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ABSTRACT

In this special journal issue, ten teachers who have consistently produced award-winning student writers share their thoughts on the teaching of poetry. The first article provides reminiscences of student poets taught by one teacher and provides a guide for use in the close reading and analysis of poetry. The second article suggests techniques for teaching poetry and provides tips for sharing and evaluating student poems. The third article discusses the "show, don't tell" method of teaching poetry, while the fourth article offers six assignments designed to familiarize students with the notion of "image." The fifth article describes an integrated American history-American literature course and explains how it helped students to produce creative works, while the sixth explains how poetry writing can be incorporated into other units of study. The seventh article offers suggestions for helping students become aware of details in their writing, and the eighth discusses poetry as a process. The ninth article details a creative writing workshop that emphasizes individualized writing, and the last explains how the English department at Evanston (Illinois) Township High School has maintained a high level of excellence in its creative writing program. The journal contains many examples of student poetry. (FL)

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Producing Award-Winning Student Poets: Tips from Successful Teachers

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Malcolm E. Stern

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PRODUCING AWARD-WINNING STUDENT POETS

True Confessions
Mary Sasse 2

Some Techniques of Teaching Poetry I Have Found Successful in the Classroom
Alta Farr Blakely 17

On Teaching Creative Writing: A Nefarious Affair
Patricia Geiser 29

Images — Those "Real Toads" of Poetry
Steve Athanases 33

Sunbeams, Moonbeams and the Hard Realities
Patricia Davis 41

Composing Original Poetry: From the Many Come a Few
Jeanne Claeys 45

"Consider, Watson, The Great Issues Which Hang from a Bootlace"
Alva Lowey 48

Poetry Is Process
Owen V. N. Hein 55

Show Me Your Dream
Peter J. LaForge 58

A Winning Environment
Curtis Crotty and Malcolm E. Stern 65

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ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This is a special issue. If the names of the contributors of articles listed on the opposite page sound familiar, it is because year after year they have been turning out award-winning student poets, whose work you have enjoyed in the Late Spring issue of this journal. Obviously these teachers are doing the right things in class, for how else could they make our HONOR ROLL OF TEACHERS so consistently? Furthermore, publication in *The Illinois English Bulletin* is only one of the many awards and honors their students have won.

Feeling sure that you would be as interested as I am in learning how they do it, I asked these eminently successful teachers to share with our readership their thoughts on the teaching of creative writing. As you might expect, they were all a bit hesitant to do so, insisting that their students deserved all the credit and that they *had* no magical secrets that could be compressed into an article. However, as you can see, they did come through — showing the kind of professional responsibility and good will that most certainly accounts in part for their classroom success.

Modesty should also be numbered among their attributes, for their classroom tips are as stimulating as they are varied. Whether their stress is on teacher attitude, motivation, content, technique, diction or style, these teachers have recounted their class experiences so vividly and precisely you will be able to try out their methods with your own students.

The last article describing the "winning environment" at Evanston Township High School will be of interest to everyone who has wondered how their English Department has managed to maintain such a high level of excellence in its creative writing program.

DOROTHY MATTHEWS
Editor

2

True Confessions

MARY SASSE
CARBONDALE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Several months ago I received a phone call from an area junior college. My caller announced an opening for a creative writing teacher. Since my high school students had demonstrated uncommon success as creative writers, the college thought that I might be a good candidate for the job. Would I be interested?

After a moment of panic, I calmly listed forty-nine reasons why I simply could not fit another assignment into my teaching schedule. My caller listened sympathetically. He understood. Another time, perhaps? Perhaps, I replied nonchalantly, and hung up the phone.

Reconstructing that experience is necessary because it includes two very important terms — "panic" and "creative writing." I confess to the former in connection with the latter — as a student and as a teacher.

As a student, I have conscientiously avoided all courses with the stated or implied intent to teach creative writing. On occasion, however, I have been trapped in one of those dandy workshop situations led by an energetic, previously-published, well-meaning teacher. Spurred on by "Now, let's have some *fun*," other students spill haikus, limericks, and cinquains onto reams of paper. Prompted by sound tracks of weird noises or airy arias, or pictures of sad old men in deserted midnight cafes, others compose ponderous odes, lilting songs, or elegiac lyrics. I sit and stare — a long, long, long time. At the last possible moment, I furtively jot down totally inane, unrelated fragments, bury my paper near the bottom of the teacher's pile of papers, and pray. Please, dear teacher, lose my paper in the shuffle, or run out of time before you can read mine aloud, or find it impossible to decipher my handwriting. Never, never, reveal my name in connection with those turkey-tracks you see before you. Now, I ask you, is that any way for a student of creative writing to behave?

As a teacher, my experience has not been much better. During my first year of teaching, I simply managed to overlook the creative writing units the curriculum guide demanded. Then, one fateful day (February 3, 1968; 4:12 p.m.), my department chairperson issued an edict: Every teacher *would* submit student work (preferably poems and short stories) to the editors of the school literary magazine. Panic time. It is one thing to avoid *writing* creative pieces; it is quite another to avoid *teaching* creative writing when

one's employment may hang in the balance. But I could try. The next day — during the last three minutes of each class period — I remarked (unobtrusively, casually), "By the way, some of you probably write poems and short stories for your own enjoyment. If you have some that you would like to share, I'd be happy to read them." There, it was done. Again I prayed. Please, dear students, compose those lilting lyrics, spin that yarn, turn in something! Now, I ask you, is that any way for a teacher of creative writing to behave?

The next morning, tucked under my classroom door was a poem. It was not the best poem ever written to be sure. The eleventh grade boy who answered my plea had no idea about form, but he had an *idea,* and he wanted to share it. Later, we had a private conference, and he made some revisions. The poem eventually made its way into the literary magazine, so he became a published poet, and I became a Creative Writing Teacher. All it really took was one kid who wasn't afraid — and one teacher who was. Thanks to Jim Temple, here is *our* first poem:

A Man

"No man is an island,"
For to survive he must have
Friends and people he can
Rely on.
But he is not a man
If he cannot stand alone
Against the job that is
Called society.

My technique hasn't varied much since that infamous day in 1968. I still say casually, "By the way. . . ." With those few words, students have been prompted to write literally hundreds of poems. I think that they have because I have *always* been "happy to read them." Of course, some students have had more talent than others, some have been more prolific, and some (to my great delight) have sustained a poetic impulse after they have left my class.

For example, in 1973, a student handed me the first 200 lines of what would become an eight-part, 1200-line poem. It begins:

"Blood on the crib's sheets, caked with linen's white,
Birth's blood and death's, red talismans of Life
Strung to my neck, one falling ever up
One weighing down, their pendant chains

So strident, choking through my flesh! Hot signs,
Hot fired, shaped in one craftsman's hands, this touch,
Together, death to birth and birth to death."
The doctor paused . . .

Later, the student, Richard Hillegas, would enter the National Council of Teachers of English writing achievement program (his entry, a haunting poem titled "Crisis," a mere 200 lines), and emerge a winner. Although Richard and I talked a good deal about his poetry in private conferences, he made few changes after our discussions — nor did he need to.

One year I taught a young man from England who spent his senior year at our school. For some years after that, I almost dreaded opening my mail. It was not the new sheaf of poems (many very good) that I dreaded reading; it was David Garbutt's handwriting. Deciphered, here is one of his poems I especially like, number 1202:

not being Orpheus
when I sing
no one listens
& of course the sun never rises
for me
& when I go through that door
for you
I won't get out
let alone not look back
not being Orpheus
I can't say things I feel
& make it sound that way
not being a siren
you won't come near me
not having a voice
you can't hear me.

David sent his last batch from New Zealand — no return address. David, where are you? The last two lines of poem number 1301 are totally illegible!

Although I generally accept poems written or scribbled or scratched on any topic, these days I do take exception to poems written about little snowflakes, pink bunnies, darling kittens, floating autumn leaves, and boyfriends or girlfriends — particularly if they jilted the author ten minutes before he/she put pen to paper. However, peppermint ice cream cones are another matter. Beth Emme's "Ice Cream Dream" is a case in point:

The peppermint ripple ice cream cone
costs forty-two cents.
So succulent. But the perfectly passionate
pink pleasure begins to drip.
Lick quick — for dreams melt,
leaving only sticky fingers
grasping a stale brown top
filled with nothing:
Pitch it.

Because I do recommend that students write from their own experience, sometimes I — who know these students well — am flabbergasted at the difference between their appearance and their reality. For example, suave senior Henry Chen surprised me with this poem titled "Confidence":

I stand behind this mask:
My meticulously fashioned hair combed just right
Teeth flashing Close-up white
Breath reformed with Listerine and Certs
Brittanias fussed smooth
Conversation gurgling like bubbles
from an exploded soda can.
Laugh, gesture, frown. Oh! Really? I heard . . .
Standing loose and easy, arms akimbo —
Palms wet as an unwrung mop.

A National Council finalist also, Henry included his poem on his application for admission to Harvard. Apparently the college, too, was impressed: it offered a scholarship which Henry, in his own inimitable way, turned down. Debbie Moulton, on the other hand, accepted a scholarship, offered perhaps because of this response to her college's request for a personal characterization:

Thoughts While Contemplating My College Application

It is ridiculously hard to place myself on paper,
To see all of my hopes, aspirations, and expectations
Typed on paper in black and white
For someone else, thousands of miles away, to evaluate . . .
How can anyone EVALUATE the hopes, fears, and emotions
Of any other person?
The words I just wrote placed me in a category:

A — acceptance
B — denial of admission, or
C — more information needed.
How like Russian Roulette it is. Fill in the blanks
And see if yours is the winning combination.
How terribly hard, if not impossible
To get my twinkle, and zest for life on paper.
Not to mention my
concern for others.
love of nature and natural things,
passion for turtle-hunting,
enjoyment of a good book or play,
collection of kooky knickknacks,
faded favorite bluejeans,
funny homemade greeting cards,
attempts at poetry . . .

If Henry, presently a medical student, and Debbie — a writer for a television station, no less! — came to some sort of personal revelation as a result of trying their poetic hand, they are richer for it. As a teacher, I, too, have been enriched as my students have shared imaginative insight. For instance, I returned to my own high school days via a poem by Bruce Arnold, a quiet, methodical young man whose reaction to English is classic:

I stand alone;
Trapped, in a tiny room
With that dread, ghastly beast
Ycleped the high school English instructor,
She extends a single knotted, gnarled finger,
And points toward a desk—
One of those awful, rough, pitted, pocked,
marked, *obscene* desks.
So I sit.
And I read.
And I try to digest thoughts of thousands—
Sophocles, and Socrates,
Homer, Ovid, Catullus,
Thoroughly sprinkled with obscenities from Canterbury
(With the complaints of Portnoy on the side).
I am forced, at gunpoint, to read this garbage;
Is it any wonder my mind wanders to the time
When some senile old man
Sat, drooling and panting, over his work.

But even in the deepest philosophical moods of Plato,
I rest assured:
When correctly viewed,
Everything is lewd . . .

As far as I know, Bruce pursues his career as a computer scientist with the same aplomb that he displayed in my class. He and I know, however, that Plato and Homer and Ovid made an indelible impression, a healthy one, when we were seventeen.

Mary Ann Martinsek, in the same manner, took me back to hot, summer days and a porch I once knew. She wrote:

We sit on the porch, Amanda and I, eating
wet slices of pink watermelon and spitting
the seeds out onto the ground. We swing
our legs and talk about the people we have met
in our travels in the library. A wasp flies toward
us: Amanda does not see it. It flies to the back of her
head, so I mention it politely. "Amanda," I say,
"there's a wasp near you." (She is afraid of wasps and
other stinging things, but I feel that I must tell
her. Wasps like watermelon.) She jumps up and runs down
the stairs. I bat at the thing with my hand, and it
flies up underneath the eaves. Amanda comes back, and we
eat watermelon and swing our legs.

Someday Mary Ann will write another *Charlotte's Web* or *Wind in the Willows*. Right now between classes at Yale she writes delicious poems about queens and gypsies and magic cats, and remembers to share her work with me still.

An imaginative mind at work is always an incredible thing to behold — at least for me. Jeff Perk's "In Among Caverns" reminded me somehow of my own childhood nightmares when he executed this rhyme:

In among caverns deep and wide,
Evil things in darkness hide.
While out in the bright light of day,
Children cheerfully carelessly play
Games that belong to times of old,
Long forgot or left to mold
In closets locked in cellars cold.

One small child avoiding the others,
Who, when called, went home to their mothers.
This small imp, alone as I said,
Went not to his home, not to his bed,
But into those cellars, rank with moisture,
To consult his books of wizards' scripture
And there demons and devils to conjure.

With hideous fiends this child played,
Cavorting about in a macabre charade.
This devil perverse, friend of the Devil
In human form, but with heart of evil,
Departed his race so to reside
In among caverns deep and wide,
Where evil things in darkness hide.

In the same way Jeff's poem made me regress, Bruce Ashby's description in "Study in Blacks and Greys" made me project into an unknown (somewhat uncomfortably):

She has been living alone
All these years,
Without realizing that some people
Leave without asking
Only to return on paper.

She has been living alone
All these years,
Unable to separate the superficial
From the real,
Perplexed over which dress to wear,
Denying memories that can no longer be shared.

She has been living alone
All these years,
Reading the Sunday paper on Monday,
Making dreams begin from there,
Waiting for clouds and rainbows to disappear
So it will be easier.

She has been living alone
All these years,
Without realizing that she was
Leaving without asking
Only to return on paper.

As I remind myself that I must control *my* destiny so it will not be a study in black and grey, I am made more uncomfortable as I contemplate the portent of these lines written by a senior just last year:

Reflections

I stood beneath the night's black dome,
And gazed up at the stars that shone
Like tiny sparks of rationed light,
Silent beacons in the night.

Then by chance I glimpsed a star,
Streaking down from heaven afar.
For an instant it lit my face,
And then by darkness was replaced.

Then I pondered from whence it came.
Had it a story or a name?
Which star was this that will shine
No longer 'til the end of time?

What dying star dare shine so bright,
To drown the others in its light,
While others merely flicker out
And go to death without a shout?

How strange it is that stars, like men,
Find different ways to meet their end:
Some die in glorious display,
While others slowly fade away.

Brian Hall, the "fresh," bright kid who wrote this poem in high school lay for months in a coma after an automobile accident and struggles now to recover. "How strange it is. . . ."

In a more pragmatic vein, during the course of teaching literature, I do try to provide my students with a rather thorough background in the techniques of traditional and modern verse. To that end, I am forever grateful to one Alan Kimbrough, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, whom I was lucky enough to have more years ago than I like to remember. He taught me how to explicate poetry — to get at what my students like to call the "hidden" meaning. I share his procedure, somewhat modified over the years, with my students so that they can analyze *on their own* what a particular poem is trying to say, to do, or to be.

Our study of technique begins with a careful study of what I have come to call my 3M (Matter, Method, Manner) System. The following is duplicated for the students:

AN OUTLINE-GUIDE TO THE READING AND EXPLICATION OF POETRY

The following guide suggests a possible approach to the close reading and analysis of poetry. The outline and the terms defined in it are a *means* only; they have no final value in and of themselves. In fact, they have no universal acceptance even as a means. However, the outline and its terms are full enough to be of great help in coming to grips with a poem and may be adapted easily for use in creative writing:

I. **Matter** — The material out of and around which the poet has built his poem. It can be ascertained initially and roughly through paraphrase and a statement of the poem's theme.

   A. **Paraphrase** — A brief prose statement of what the poem says.

   B. **Theme** — The general idea, if any, in the poem. The poem may be simply a description or dramatization of a particular experience; on the other hand, the poet may try to generalize from that experience, either through direct statement or implication. In any case, any poem will be *about* something, if only because it uses words.

II. **Method** — The *technical* way in which the poet has treated his subject matter, how he has arranged, shaped, and ordered the *matter*.

   A. **Dramatic situation** — The circumstances in which the poem is spoken; the speaker and the speaker's situation with regard to both time and place.

   B. **Development** — The frame, form, or organization in which the poem is spoken. For example, has the poem formal divisions or changes in subject matter; is there any evolution in thought and feeling; or does the speaker maintain a constant stance throughout, even if the subject or topic changes?

   C. **Diction** — The kind and quality of the words selected by the speaker, considered for their denotative and connotative values.

D. **Imagery** — Comparisons, expressed and implied. For example, simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism.

E. **Metrics**

1. Verse form: basic foot, line, rhyme, and unit of the poem.
2. Rhythm: The result of scanned meter plus such things as caesura, balance, antithesis, run-on and end-stopped lines, paragraphs.
3. Sound effects: Things such as rhyme, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, alliteration which support and intensify conditions *already present.*

III. **Manner** — The moods and ideas apparent after the matter of a poem has been treated formally. Keep in mind the *Attitude,* the basic or actual emotion and point of view, and the *Tone,* the apparent emotion or point of view.

IV. **Final Effect** — The *matter* of a poem treated in a certain *method* and *manner* should result in a complete emotional and rational statement, feeling or impression. Although it cannot be wholly paraphrased, the fact that a poem exists for the purpose of achieving some effect obligates you as a student of literature to attempt to summarize that effect.

When everyone (well, almost everyone) is comfortable with the terminology, as a class we analyze a poem, usually a Spenser sonnet ("In the World's Theatre...") or a Longfellow sonnet ("Nature"). These poems work well because they are not too complex and they include most of the techniques we have discussed. Then the class breaks into groups; each group is given another sonnet to explicate according to the 3M System. When the groups are finished with their analyses, one volunteers to share what it has discovered. The others are responsible for filling in missing information or for "correcting" mistaken notions. Finally, each student is given a sonnet to explicate in writing so that I can check to see whether or not the techniques are understood.

When I am confident that the students have some mastery over the elements of traditional verse techniques, we examine "free" verse. Generally, I use one of Walt Whitman's poems so that students can see how parallelism can contribute to rhythm. It helps to show them a sample of the King James version of the Bible (I Corinthians, for example) as a point of comparison. In any event, I make sure that students understand that good free verse

is disciplined and is *not* simply a dribble of words over a page, freely.

Two poetic techniques deserve special mention because we spend a good amount of time on them. The first is imagery. I think *I* was thirty years old before I really understood all that term meant. We work with universal and particular symbols and with images, in particular how the latter can be transmitted by word choices that prompt the senses. The second is sound. It helps kids to learn the phonetic alphabet first, and the placement of the tongue, teeth, etc., when making vowel sounds. We consider the emotional implications of cacophonous and euphonious sounds (culturally-derived?) and how sounds can be used to intensify conditions already present. Keats' poem "To Autumn" illustrates the latter extremely well, but a student poem, such as Anne Deichmann's "The Snake," works just as well:

Through the silent grass, a snake
Slithers out and peers closely
At the sundrenched world.
Slowly, secretly, it slides
Across the grass, searching for food.
Its serpentine tongue
Flicks effortlessly from its mouth.
Its scales, smooth and silky,
Reflecting silvers and golds,
Glint in the sun.
Soon the snake retreats to
Its hole, its search
Unsuccessful.

Now *that* tenth grader really understood alliteration, consonance, assonance — even if she couldn't define them.

On occasion, some students enjoy imitating the grand masters. *I* don't get the kick out of their imitations that they, who apparently have been raised on *National Lampoon*, do from their efforts. However, it does take effort. For example, Jonathan Piper delighted in my expression (and in his cleverness) when he handed this poem to me in lieu of a "real" assignment on Whitman:

Leaves of Trash
(With apologies to the Good Gray Poet)

Out of the volume endlessly waltzing,
Out of the dustry library, a meaningless shuffle,

Over the sterile pages, where the child sang in a mire of
dangling phrases,
Down from a hollowed silo,
From the memories of a cuckoo who chanted alone,
From the shifting sounds of some unfortunate mongoloid,
From the last watery whistles of unvegetated mausoleum floors,
From untrimm'd willow trees' weeping folds,
I, reader of Paine and Joyce, uniter of unrelated clauses,
Taking all chances to hide them, and swiftly misplacing the verb,
A song reminisce. . . .

And on and on and on through the complete Whitman poem!

Sometimes students' imitative efforts are even more ambitious. A couple of years ago, for instance, a class collaborated in writing a "Big Muddy Anthology" after studying *Spoon River Anthology.* The results were often poignant, funny, and revealing. Paula Smith, a mother now, wrote this:

I was born and raised in Carbondale.
Mostly I was spoiled, over-protected
And a trouble-maker when I was young.
One time in school a girl was being sassy,
So I dumped flour on top of her head.
I got whipped but didn't cry.
Why let others know some things really hurt.
I always stood up for myself
And was pretty independent.
I loved water and sun;
I swam by fifth grade
And learned to waterski in eighth.
I also loved Randy, my steady.
We planned to get married and have children someday.

Last year a senior class outdid itself — and me. The result? A twenty page "Carbondale Tales" patterned after Chaucer's "Prologue," for which I was "allowed" to write the first and last lines *a la* Chaucer. It was a *real* panic for me and a real pleasure for them.

The real pleasure for those of us who dare to call ourselves Creative Writing Teachers is quite simple and has practically nothing to do with *our* ability. It has to do with our students' ability to "distill life," as Gwendolyn Brooks recommends. Keith Moe, a junior student in 1972, did just that in this poem, one of my favorites:

Somewhere in Howell Township, NJ

A bedroom at night in an old country house
with windows opened wide.
Silent lights creep up and down
the worm of a distant road.
I sit on the edge of the bed, tense,
dressed only in underwear.
I feel bare as I am absorbed by the night.

My fingers cannot help but twitch and tremble;
I think of many things, too many things—
houses and history and bones in the earth,
all with me here tonight.

The usual twinge of apprehension
sets in, but I am not alone in
this room of silences, nor alone in
my thoughts of silences.

Old chest, mirror, and venerable chair
sit and stare.
Other people have come before and used
all these articles
Some surely have sat on this bed as I sit.

The distant lights flicker and continue
to move on to greater things, greater roads,
broad avenues and penetrating street-lamps.
I think of these lights, silent but moving.

I am too naked in the dark.

Last year Keith returned to my class, many poems later, to give a reading of some of his recent work. Again, the pleasure was all mine, although anyone who says he would "give his two little fingers" to have written *The Right Madness on Skye,* Richard Hugo's Scottish sojourn poems, must love writing poetry as much as I like to read it. From Keith's many truly excellent pieces, I chose this one to include here:

Old Black Man Courts Old Black Woman Across the Aisle of a Greyhound While Everybody Smiles

His knotty head bobs with talk and eager cough,
'cos she was put there,
in the first seat across,
like a mountain of buttered grits,
for him.
Both going South,
they agree to court
for one day and one long night.
He has photographs! his pride,
he passes yellow squares of a dead wife,
like little sheets of gold,
across to her *um-hum* and *oh?*,
then squeezes stories
from every scrap in his pockets
down to a winning dog-race stub,
and once, braving up,
tags her hand for emphasis:
Yas!

She laughs and laughs,
shoves back her seat to laugh,
hasn't laughed so much since '53,
she says,
(that was a while before *hers* died)
then growing misty and self-conscious—
toes bursting through shoes,
she buries them under the seat in front—
confides in him simple secrecies
in stage-whispers.

He, roaring,
"No no you *ain't*,"
bopping his armrest:
"you just pleasurably plump
and I *like* that!"
eyeballing then
up and down the bus
quick and gleaming.
Both laugh harder.

We smile harder.
They'll laugh harder
all the way down to Mississippi
to forgive the pain
they both soak
every night with their dentures.

Although I cannot and would not take any credit for the talent Keith displays, I have been his enthusiastic respondent — from the first poem he showed me to the ones he hopes to publish soon. As I wish him good luck, I turn to the batch of poems some students just turned in — in response to my remark, "By the way. . . ." I will mark them like this: "Here's a nifty phrase," "Super idea!" "How about rearranging these two lines?" "Come in and we'll talk about this idea!" And I will remember Jim Temple and Brian Hall and Keith Moe and the others who dared to let their creative selves emerge, and who found intense, concentrated ways to express their ideas.

In a weak moment — just one — I sufficiently conquered my panic at the thought of creative writing to squeeze out the following tortured lines. My apologies to Mr. Masters and to my students. As I'm fond of remembering, Mr. Shaw, those who can, do; those who can't, teach.

The English Teacher

I was an English teacher at the high school.
As I read poetry aloud to them, my students
Slept through my classes. As I explained
Short stories, essays and plays to them,
They yawned, wrote notes to each other and
Gazed out the windows.
They only wanted life first-hand,
Not second-hand from Poe or Shakespeare, or Masters.
At night, my students danced, laughed and sang;
I graded essays and tests and lamented their failures.
Did they care at all for
Literature, Language and Learning?
Still, I remember, too, the sensitive pictures they drew;
The poems, stories, essays wrought carefully, feverishly;
The smiles shy and bold; the pleading questions;
The special thanks in their eyes—
And I loved them, I loved them all.

Some Techniques of Teaching Poetry I Have Found Successful in the Classroom

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One June morning, near the end of the 1979-80 school year, I came into my eight o'clock junior English class carrying a bag of peanuts and thirty plastic vegetable pans from the grocery store. I began passing out one pan and one peanut to each student.

"What's this, Mrs. Blakely?"

"We're going to write a poem," I answered. "Remember?" On their dittoed class schedule which I had handed out at the beginning of the quarter I had "promised" them we would be doing some poetry writing of our own after the study in our English literature course of Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, and others.

But back to the peanut. My friend Lillian Fasman of Mather High School, Chicago, had told me that a peanut was a good device for teaching imagery in poetry; I decided to try it.

"Can we eat it?"

"Not yet. First, feel the outside. What does it feel like?"

"It's dusty. It feels like cleansing powder."

"Look at it. What does it look like?"

"It's a dirty tan. It looks like a caterpillar." "It looks like a chicken." "... like a larva."

"What does it sound like?"

"A birthday gift." "Sounds like shootin' craps."

"All right. Now, crack it open and listen while you do."

"Sounds like egg shells." "Like Rice Crispies."

"O.K., now look at the peanuts inside. What do they make you think of?"

"Fetuses of twins." "I've only got one. Looks like a beaver to me." "It makes me think of George Washington Carver and my Black History class."

I was delighted with the last answer. Here I had a sudden, unexpected chance to give them a simple explanation of denotative and connotative meaning, helpful in their appreciation of poetry.

Then we went back to taking out the peanut, feeling the looseness of its red skin ("like dry leaves"), smelling it ("a dry smell"), taking off the skin and feeling it again ("like a bar of soap," "an

onion"), breaking it open and looking at the two halves, and, finally eating it ("crunches like Chinese fortune cookies").

I decided this was a good technique. The students were amused enough at my passing out peanuts that they forgot to be annoyed at having to write a poem.

My experience in encouraging students to write poetry has been in two Chicago public high schools — first, Hyde Park High, then Kenwood Academy. In both schools "minority" students are definitely in the majority. The techniques described here I have used (with the necessary adaptation) with low-track (in Chicago called Essential track) freshmen and sophomores on up through Honors and Advanced Placement seniors.

I leave poetry writing till near the end of the course, mainly to allow the students to develop trust in me and comfort with each other; for poetry writing, students need to feel that they have a friendly audience.

PREPARATION FOR WRITING

The first thing I usually say to a class about poetry writing is that I would prefer their poems not rhyme. This startles them because most students feel that poetry has to have rhyme and rhythm. I explain that *rhythm* is fine, but that trying for rhyme is likely to get in the way of a really "felt" meaning. To me the essence of lyric poetry is honest, sincere expression. Therefore I ask students to write on something they feel strongly about. One of the Regular-track juniors — her name is Pamella — submitted this poem:

To Be Free

Once there was a being
  Deep inside of me,
Struggling there, struggling
  to be free.
I opened up, let her out,
  and found that Pam was me.
She had been there within,
  Laboring to be free.

Now she has my face,
  How readily I see
I was not together,
  For I was not really me;

And yet she had been there,
  Striving to be free.
I had tried to make myself believe
  What was expected, I could be.
I've long since discovered
  What was expected
was not the person I should be.

Now I am as I want to be;
Hey, I've got myself together,
This is real and true me!
No, she's no longer there,
For now Pam is Free!

In place of rhyme I stress the use of imagery and figures of speech. The purpose of the peanut session related above was to help students think in terms of imagery — the representation through language of sense experience. As we looked at, listened to, felt, smelled, and tasted the peanut, students were jotting down what it made them think of. This conversation led us naturally into a discussion of some of the simpler figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, and personification.

One young man, a junior, later turned in the following:

Life's Clock

Life is like a clock.
The clock of life is wound only once,
And no man or woman has the power
  to tell just where the hands will stop.
The present is the only thing that's ours;
So place no faith in tomorrow,
For then the clock may be still.

In preparation for poetry writing, students need to be presented with models. When teaching an Essential-track sophomore class last year, since we had almost no satisfactory poetry in our textbook, I dittoed four or five pages of material for them — first, some poems for our study together, then a simplified explanation of some poetic techniques based on Laurence Perrine's *Sound and Sense.*

The first poem I gave them was one of Eve Merriam's taken from Dunning, Lueders, and Smith's collection *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle* (Lothrop, 1966):

How to Eat a Poem

Don't be polite.
Bite in.
Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice
that may run down your chin.
It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.

You do not need a knife or fork or spoon
or plate or napkin or tablecloth.

For there is no core
or stem
or rind
or pit
or seed
or skin
to throw away.

This poem gave the students both a clue to how to approach poetry and an example of an extended metaphor. It also provided us a chance to discuss the fact that poetry should not be wordy — that every word should have a purpose.

They liked Langston Hughes' "Dreams" as an example of metaphor, and they were sympathetically amused at Sydney King Russell's "Dust" as an example of irony.

For juniors and seniors a fine poem for illustrating imagery is Robert Browning's "Meeeting at Night." (All teenagers love a lover!) Another is Richard Wilbur's "Stop." (Both of these may be found in Perrine's *Sound and Sense.*)

After students, by one means or another, have been exposed to poetry of "real" poets, I always read to them poems from my file of student poetry. These usually range from the simplest to perhaps some of the best, depending on the class. Students should not be frightened off by two many excellent poems.

A girl in an Essential-track sophomore class wrote this:

Getting to School on Time

Someone's in the bathroom;
Can't decide what to wear
Or what shoes and bag will match;
Hair will not cooperate;

Pancakes are too thick,
Books too heavy.
Car pulls off—
I'm late for school again.

This conveys a real experience students can all empathize with. The following, untitled, shows a student's use of metaphor:

The labored groans of trucks
are thunder.
The neon lightning splits
the empty air—
Holds no rain.

The author of the following (a senior) made no pretentions to being a poet, but he conveyed sincere feeling in "High School":

High school—
Right now I feel like an overworked fool.
Up all night reading books,
Six hours of school wherever I look.

It seems the nagging will never cease,
You can't even go to the toilet in peace!
Hallguards booming and teachers yelling,
Food that keeps the hallways smelling.
Lunchtime comes, I'm tired as can be.
But no one gives a damn 'cause it's only me.

My body longs for a welcoming bed,
Some place to lay my throbbing head.
Home to eat and rest away,
Back to school the very next day.
I was right, no one but a fool
Would have waited this long to drop out of school!

A junior girl from Haiti wrote this:

Sound of Silence

Silence is thoughtful,
full of unspoken words;
silence is quiet
with a sound of its own.

Silence is like a stream,
Soothing and peaceful,
as beautiful and flowing;
silence is a sound without a sound.

A senior in the modern poetry minicourse wrote the following and gave it a date for the title:

8/6/45

An argent cloud
Against a sunset
Of gold and blood
And amethystine splendor.
The thundercloud towers
Above an island
Or field
Or wood
Or city
Marching to the sky.

A beautiful vista —
Before the night.

Laurence Perrine, in his *Sound and Sense* (5th edition, 1977, p. 5), says: "Literature . . . exists to communicate significant experience. . . . Two false approaches to poetry can be avoided if we keep this concept . . . firmly in mind. The first approach always looks for a lesson or a bit of moral instruction. The second expects to find poetry always beautiful."

It is important to convey these points to students preparing to write poetry. The following three poems are illustrative. The first was written by a senior girl in a ten-week minicourse on modern poetry. She did not want to be in the class, but it was the only one which fit her schedule. She had tried to commit suicide the year before. She would not sign her name to her poem.

I Wonder

Often I wonder—
Does a blind child miss much
because he is lacking in sight?
Does he miss the horror that
goes on before my eyes?

Does a deaf child hear
the things that I can see?
Would he want to hear the shrieking
cries of humans in despair?

Does a mute child long to speak
the words that cut and wound—
The words that even I dare not say?

A few years ago, during a period of national racial unrest and school riots, a student wrote:

Why— why— why—
do dishes fly across the sky
and mar the walls
and break in falls
and splatter cut glass right and left?
And why are there riots just for jest
that hurt the people who love you best
and leave a stigma on the rest
that stays with you until you die?
Why? Why? Why? Why?

At about the same time there was much gang activity on the South Side of Chicago, particularly with the Blackstone Rangers. One young man living in the midst of it wrote:

Caught

Bushes lining the sidewalk,
dead and unleaved in mid-June;
Glass under my feet, lights above
with electronic fluorescence
illuminating my pursuers close behind.
That crack in the sidewalk catches the torn sole
of my aged right gym shoe.
Change in my pocket jingles as I begin my fall.
My hands shoot out to stop the sidewalk from hitting
my head,

USELESS!
"STONE'S THANG!!"

The thunder of a .45 cracks the already broken night.
My back receives the fire-hot
Metal that zips through my body.
My blood flows not, the pump is shredded.
My head breaks a pop bottle (glass in my eyes!) as it
encounters the ground.
My left foot hits, toes first, tearing off my toenail.
I know not the fate of my right foot,
I am already dead.

When I read that, the human side of me was appalled at what this young man was living through. Later the critic side of me said, "What terrific imagery!"

Students should be led to understand the language which seems most natural to them for the poem is acceptable. A blustering, often-protesting junior boy wrote:

Me and My Brother

Me and my brother, we had a fight,
That last blow of mine put out his light.
He tries to act just like a father,
I wish he would stop going through the bother;
We don't act like brothers and that's a fact,
But from this day on I call a pact.
Many people don't know their left, many, their right,
But I know in the future we will be tight.

The poetry of Beatrice Julian illustrates this fitting of sound — or language — to sense. Three of her poems were published in *The English Bulletin* in 1972, and Wilmer Lamar, who was editor at the time, called me from Urbana to be sure that she had actually written them. The following is one:

NOSTALGIA: I miss our four-room basement apartment on the West Side and my childhood.
Trixie'n
Bony'n
Junior'n
Bea,
we played in the sunshine as long as we could,
bein' as we were undergroun', we never saw much of the sun;
Seven, six, five, n'four,
we were the mole children
undergroun' dwellers, that came up for light.

Whammo Bubble gum, we each got our piece.
Song in the back of my mind:
I want a yellow one, just like the sun . . .
If momma don't give me one, I'll steal it later on.
And we would blow bubbles,
drop rocks down the sewer hole:
we was the rat patrol — we killed every one.
We chased an old mangy cat all the way down the alley,
and fell in love with an old scruffy dog.
We laughed at old ladies walking funny,
an' baldheaded men;
watched the cool dudes walk.
Our days were long and happy,
our souls were young and free—
with always an emphasis on yellow—
we four liked the sun.

Although I discourage the use of rhyme in poetry writing, in more advanced junior and senior classes we do discuss rhyme as one poetic device. Pope said, "The sound must seem an echo to the sense." My position is "*If* you can use rhyme without its interfering with the sense, fine, but sense should have priority." This poem by Lisa Jewell makes good use of rhyme. (Lisa won $200 in 1979 for another poem in Gwendolyn Brooks' Poet Laureate Contest.)

Petal Power

Everyone thinks happiness comes up roses,
But I like daisies when the wet world
Glistens in gold and white. I love when noses
Can smell the sweet nectar of the flowers with petals curled
Around the crickets croaking their spring songs. I
Like daisies, for they help me find out
If he loves me or if he loves me not (sigh),
As if daisies know what love is all about.

Roses are hard to pick. Thorns prick fingers that
Try to grasp a rose's beauty. Daisies are nice, for they
Are happy to make their home in my hair or hat
Or sweater. I like daisies, for daisies may
Mean spring, spring love, and so you see—
Happiness comes up daisies for me!

All the techniques mentioned above aim at motivating students to write out of their own experience. To suggest another kind of poetry — in which they let their imaginations take flight — I started off with an idea of Kenneth Koch. His book, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams,* is based on his experience teaching poetry to children at P. S. 61, in a Puerto Rican community in Lower Manhattan. He does not believe in the traditional methods used to teach children poetry. One of his techniques is to have the students write a collective poem. Each student writes one line, beginning "I wish" and containing a color and a person. These are turned in anonymously and then combined as a whole. Following Mr. Koch's lead, our senior poetry class came up with the following:

I wish all colors and all people were the same.
I wish I were magenta.
I wish I had magical powers.
I wish I had a big red nose like a circus clown.
I wish the misty blue sky were the center of my eyes.
I wish that an azure sky was forever over the heads of lovers.
I wish I weren't bewitched by your glassy green glow.
I wish my friend didn't have gray cloudy feelings.
I wish white-suited doctors could give painless shots.
I wish gray gargoyles were allowed to be firemen.

The purpose of this exercise is to show the students that their cumulative efforts can have a highly imaginative result and thus to help nudge them into trying something more extensive.

But just how does one begin to write a poem? For most students getting started is the hardest. Following are two methods of procedure which I passed out to my Essential English II class of sophomores.

Method One

1. Think of a human experience you feel strongly about.
2. Jot down ideas about it — things you feel you want to say.
3. Does one of your ideas have a rhythm pattern you like? If so, let that establish the rhythm of the poem.
4. Group ideas logically.
5. Rework other ideas so they fit more or less with the initial pattern.

Method Two

1. Same as #1 above.
2. Same as #2 above.
3. Think of some comparisons — objects, perhaps. You are looking for possible similes and metaphors or other figures of speech. Describe that object or those objects.
4. What relationship can you establish between the experience and the object or objects? State in terms of metaphor or simile.
5. Arrange comparisons in the same logical order.

I devised the first of these methods in my own efforts to write poetry. (The class will appreciate hearing one or two poems their teacher has written.) The second method was borrowed — I have forgotten from where.

It is important, I think, to give students a little more lead time on a poetry assignment than on a short essay assignment. Some will feel they cannot write poetry; the strain of too little time should not be added. I tell them what a friend of mine once said: "Poetry writing is the poor man's psychiatrist; if you have a problem, a sorrow, a concern, the very act of writing (and polishing) a poem about it will make you feel better."

SHARING AND EVALUATING STUDENTS' POEMS

Before poems are turned in, I inform students that I will be reading some of the poetry to the class anonymously, but any student who does not want his or her poem read aloud should so indicate on the paper. I do not read their efforts aloud until I have had a chance to look them over to discover something positive I can say about each poem and to prepare to read them aloud effectively the next day. After a student has labored — lovingly or excruciatingly — over a poem, he or she does not want it butchered in front of the class!

When we discuss a poem, we can usually find something good to say about it, particularly the imagery. Or perhaps it was an unconscious use of assonance — which could be explained at that time.

At this point a student will often become so proud of the work that he or she will reveal the authorship.

For my written comments on poetry I usually use a lead pencil, even though for prose assignments I use a red pen. My theory is that poetry is often so personal (I keep stressing to them that good

poetry must be "for real," sincere) that a red pencil is a violation of the writer's "self." I am likely to put my suggestions in the form of questions: "Do you think the word _____ would fit your rhythm better (be more graphic, precise, etc.)?" I sometimes make suggestions as to stanza division — something which they often do not think about but which makes their work look like real poetry.

After the first writing, I also make suggestions on punctuation. Since the purpose of punctuation is clarity, a poem can usually be improved by its use even though we are somewhat more permissive with the punctuation of poetry than of prose. There should usually be some unifying principle in the punctuation; the format of the poem — such as the stanza division — may serve as a guide. But I believe punctuation should not be omitted unless doing so serves some real purpose.

I almost never give a grade lower than a C on poetry because beginning efforts should be encouraged.

My students correct their prose compositions after I have evaluated them and have shown each person how to improve his or her essay, and they do the same with their poetry. Seeing in their hands what looks like a fairly finished piece of work gives them a success experience with poetry.

To add to the students' sense of accomplishment, I often suggest that we make a class book of poetry. I pass out a ditto stencil to each student, and on it each writes or types his or her poem. I ask that someone volunteer to design a cover; I am usually surprised at the hidden artistic talent in the class. For the back cover of the "book" I often pass around another ditto stencil and have each student write his or her signature on it. I run off the poems, collate them in alphabetical order according to the last names of the students, staple them, and lo! a memento of the class of which they can be proud!

MATERIALS AND POETRY CONTESTS

Two final comments: Materials I have found useful are: (1) "The Many Faces of Poetry," by J. A. Senn, a pamphlet published by Xerox Education Publications, 1974, Middletown, Connecticut 06457; and (2) "Building Positive Attitudes Toward Poetry," by Robert Freier, English Department, Osborn High School, Detroit (*Harbrace Teachers Notebook in English*, Fall 1960). Both of these give practical suggestions for getting people started at poetry writing. (3) *Sound and Sense* by Laurence Perrine, now in its

fifth edition, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. This is the best text I have found for the study of poetry in general. It is meant for a college text, but we have used it, in its succeeding editions, most happily for our Honors and Advanced Placement seniors for twenty years.

Finally, when students have done good work on poetry, they should be encouraged to enter their poems in various competitions. Our Kenwood English Department stresses three competitions mainly, that of the IATE (deadline now January 31); the National Scholastic Magazine competition (a February deadline); and Gwendolyn Brooks' Poet Laureate competition for elementary and high school students (May 1 deadline).

On Teaching Creative Writing: A Nefarious Affair

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. . . .
17 years ago, I froze my head.
I just stuck it in the ice-cream freezer
at the Jewel.
When I pulled it out some of my hair stayed
frozen onto a box of Dreamsicles. . . .

—PAM HAYWARD, Class of '78

(Thank you, Pam. That about sums it up.) "Show me," I told her, and she sure did. Now I know precisely and forever the futility of trying not to feel.

Show, don't tell. That's all I suspect for sure about writing or teaching writing. I found these words in a creative writing book about ten years ago, and I've been brazenly appropriating and improvising classroom activities to implement them ever since.

I steal most of my ideas from books, friends, and enemies, but lately I've noticed a pattern, a modus operandi, to my felonious ways. Like the French Riviera jewel thief, I lift only the most visual or startling gems, those that show well.

The problem inherent in teaching ***Show, don't tell*** for eighteen weeks to high school students is that you just can't tell them that.

Obviously. So, on the first yellow morning each fall, I take them to the plaza adjoining the school to gaze at people, stores, gum wrappers, signs and to look for "Fabulous Realities." (I can't remember where I stole that one.) We don't have an open campus; it is forbidden to waltz out of school mid-day. But my department chairperson gives me shaky-smile approval, and I tell my kids to look official, and we piedpiper it down the hall and cut out a side door. Once we merge with the local populace, we split up, take notes, details, and I tell them to meet me at Walgreen's.

Funny. They creep around, trying not to disturb the moon dust, staring at wide ladies with paisley shopping bags who glare back and mutter what the old always say to teenagers, or they sit on the metal benches with notebooks poised waiting for a "fabulous reality" to strike them. One usually does.

I always get to Walgreen's ahead of them to cage a cup of coffee. My kids drift in, giggling, still stunned that they have been allowed to walk and talk and look and now perchance to eat during class. They sit around me and offer suspicious smiles. I am a strange teacher. What will I do next?

Before the next class, they organize their best notes into a free form poem with some organizing idea that they can't tell but must show. I learn about "yellow ball sunshine bouncing off windows," "a woman with a brown cigarette dangling, dropping ashes into her Trib," and of course the plastic shoes and the armless manikins and the way the bubbles in Sharon's soda crowded around her straw and slowly died. Then someone as gifted as Pam will take a risk and leap from her view of the freezer at Jewel to a vision of frozen feelings.

Oh, it's not all great poetry, but they always bring back enough surprise to make it worthwhile, and hopefully I've shown them, rather than told them that poetry lurks nearby.

They soon start showing me a few things too. One day, when I wasn't feeling particularly hilarious, I heard an undercurrent of laughter rippling around the room. The sly grins, the winks, the bottled chuckles spilled out at odd moments. Expectancy oozed. They wanted me to find the joke; they weren't going to tell me. Since I am also perverse, I couldn't ask; I had to figure it out, see it myself. So, while we all pretended to read Silvia Plath (which is hard to do), I looked and looked and almost gave up and almost screamed, "Tell me!" when I saw. Most of them had traded one shoe with a neighbor just before class. My little "sad eyes" in the back of the second row had thrust her wiggling feet into the aisle: one white tennis shoe, one brown oxford. My football player

had crammed one foot into a girl's platform sandal. And when I saw, and when they saw I saw, explosion.

After the laughter and the class, dinner and the dishes, feet up, head back, I realized. They had been showing, not telling me, and with some pride, that they were truly original, creative creatures. (And I'd tell you about the time I had to leave the class to get something and returned to find them gone, just a sweaty silence, and how I found them finally, plastered against the lockers in an alcove down the hall, panting silently their audacious surprise; I'd tell you, but you'd surely think we'd gone too far.... I know I did.)

We usually go on one real field trip, with the permission slips, the endless collection of bus money, the written justification, the plans for the substitute, the whole legal, approved FIELD TRIP. Nevertheless, I love to go to the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Chicago. They give tours, and most of the exhibits are wild affairs. We've leaped through a room full of tires; we've pressed our ears to talking walls (the pre-natal or pre-language sounds were terrifyingly familiar—); we've seen ceramic toilets with ceramic you-know whats in them; we've walked through art that hung like upside-down willow trees, and they've come back with surprising lines but more important, a sense that just as art doesn't have to reside in square frames over plastic-covered sofas, poems or stories don't have to exist in sing-song cages of rhyme or formula. The arrangement of words, the colors of words can bounce out and dangle, and maybe a reader should be allowed to walk through a poem or maybe even sit in one for a while.

That takes care of two or three days. What do we do with the other eighty-eight or so? Well, during our stroll through free verse, into some forms, and then to sketches and hopefully a short story, I borrow all the good things anyone can find in a creative writing book or overhear on a bus.

I use as many first-hand sensory experiences as possible. Aside from the few trips in and around the school, we listen to music, eat strange food, examine objects for metaphorical interpretations, write sketches around pictures and news items. We act out words. (I think I made this one up before I read it somewhere.) Each person reenters the room in the manner of an adjective, and then we analyze what that person *showed* us. We see how "fearful" consists of averted eyes, a trembling body hunched around slippery books and a hesitant stumble to a far desk. On another day, we improvise dialogue, on a two-chair bus for example, trying to get a sense of natural dialogue and the movement involved: a hand to

the face, tightly crossed legs, a clutched purse, anything to make written conversation come alive.

I also use models and a few forms. We read lively poetry and stories and discuss what we like about them. I give them wild starters such as "When Marilyn Monroe met the whale,..." (That's mine; I love it.) I ask them to write a poem converting nouns into verbs: "I gold madly." (Mine too.) They try the stock poetic forms — haiku, tankas, limericks, ballads and so forth — and some ambitious souls try a sonnet. But the free verse is always the best. As soon as they try to tame the imagery, pushing it into one form or another, they lose something precious and honest. (Sorry, Mr. Frost. I think they play better without the net, at this stage of the game, anyway.) It is fun, however, to work with a few forms after I'm sure they know that good writing depends on things more crucial.

Speaking of crucial, I'm about to make what I believe will be my biggest theft, most valuable haul, since ***Show, don't tell.*** This one's called ***Recall.*** Actually, the two may turn out to be a matched pair.

This past year, I took a few courses at Columbia College in Chicago. It's a small four-year school devoted to the performing and display arts, sort of a trade school for the arts: dance, TV and film production, photography, theatre and WRITING! They've had unusual success with inner-city students, and practicing writers keep coming back like addicts to learn and teach. They've produced an award-winning literary magazine, beating out the big eastern schools. (The scene in the English Office the day they won First Place was delirious. Tall stacks of dittoed handouts slid into each other with drunken abandon.) The whole method is copyrighted; see "The Story Workshop Method: Writing From Start to Finish," John Schultz, in *College English,* December, 1977.

So, on this wet August day, as I begin my yearly reinvention of my creative writing course, the prospect of lifting what I need and can adapt from a COPYRIGHTED METHOD is giving me the old itch. (Dear Mr. Schultz, I promise to take only what I can wear in one year. I will not waste.)

The heart of John Schultz's approach is the recall activity. I just have to experiment with it although my class size and time frame are different. At Columbia, they sit knee to knee in groups no larger than eighteen for four or five hours at a time with very few breaks. No way. Very visual student writing, modern and classical selections are read aloud. The students then orally ***recall*** in third person, present tense, the parts they remember vividly, using voice and gesture to clarify and emphasize.

The process of transferring that activity to the writing activity, the ultimate goal, is almost purely inductive. When students remember a clear passage, they know it is good. They would not have recalled it at all if the writing had not been detailed, surprising, organized — all the things we look for and appreciate in literature. Naturally, when students do their own writing, they almost instinctively write more vividly. From a student point-of-view there is no more delicious thrill than hearing your own words being "recalled" by a classmate or the teacher. I know.

Of course, there's much more to this madness. If you're interested, see Mr. Schultz' article or better yet go to Columbia College for a course or two. I'm hooked. The method pulled hundreds of pages out of me, and I just sold my first fiction to *The Chicago Reader*, a piece I wrote for a class.

I just may see you there.

Images — Those "Real Toads" of Poetry

Steve Athanases
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nor till the poets among us . . .
. . . can present
for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them,'
shall we have
it.

from "Poetry" by Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore offers this ideal starting point for teachers of writing. Student poets are often eager and imaginative but, without guidance or models, seem to drift on the air above their gardens, seldom landing for a walk with bare feet through the dirt and detail. And even those who make that walk often neglect to tell how the soil feels between the toes, how the tomato leaf smell stains the fingertips, how the orange zinnias catch the sun. We need to help our students rediscover those "real toads," the things concrete, the sensory details. No matter how abstract in design, these gardens, or poems, need details to trigger the imaginations of readers.

As teachers of writing, most of us have endured those poems that begin (and often likewise end) with lines like "Childhood was a wonderful time," "I was so in love," or "Death is a terrible thing," without mention of playing "Mother May I" and "Red Rover"; spilling buttered popcorn on a date's wool skirt at the movies; or for death, watching in a trance the six pairs of pall bearers' gloves. These "word representations" of physical experience, or images, are what young poets need to create. We can easily illustrate for them through class dialogue the value of imagery. A topic? Last Saturday night's concert. What was it like? "Excellent." "Dynamite." "A real rush." But these responses create no real impression or flavor of the event. I suggest they search their memories for images.

Perhaps they remember at the concert:

1. a Hell's Angel type in tattoos and sleeveless denim, scalping tickets at the door
2. the drummer's gold lamé jumpsuit
3. blinding strobe lights
4. crashing leads
5. the bitter scent of marijuana wafting from the Men's Room at intermission
6. a thousand matches lit after the last set like some religious rite
7. the throbbing mass screaming "More!"

Words such as "super," "horrible," "fantastic," and "great" lose value not only from overuse but because they simply classify, *telling* the reader how to react, rather than recreating images of experience that can ultimately *suggest* a certain value to a reader.

Many twentieth century poets and lyricists can serve as models for students struggling with the notion of image. Consider how Amy Lowell makes her point of contrast here almost entirely through images:

A Decade

When you came, you were like red wine
and honey.
And the taste of you burnt my mouth
with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
I hardly taste you at all for I know your
savor,
But I am completely nourished.

Equally rich are the images in Karl Shapiro's "Auto Wreck" which, like Amy Lowell's, are often similes and metaphors. Consider Shapiro's "cops" after they arrive at the scene of the wreck:

> One is still making notes under the light.
> One with a bucket douches ponds of blood
> Into the street and gutter.
> One hangs lanterns on the wrecks that cling,
> Empty husks of locusts, to iron poles.

The image of locust husks, when compared with the wrecked autos wrapped around poles, becomes a compound image, suggesting new things about the now vacant cars. Other poems and songs such as those that follow are equally effective as models:

POETRY

"Patterns" Amy Lowell
"Disabled" Wilfred Owen
"What Happens to a Dream Deferred?" from "Harlem" Langston Hughes
"in Just . . ." e.e. cummings
"Humanity i love you . . ." e.e. cummings
"Those Winter Sundays" Robert Hayden
"Lady Lazarus" Sylvia Plath
"The Bean Eaters" Gwendolyn Brooks
"The Red Wheelbarrow" William Carlos Williams
"Piano" D.H. Lawrence
"Preludes" T.S. Eliot
"In a Station of the Metro" Ezra Pound

SONGS

"Both Sides Now" Joni Mitchell
"Tin Angel" Joni Mitchell
"I've Loved These Days" Billy Joel
"I Think it's Going to Rain Today" Randy Newman
"Alabama" Neil Young
"The Ghosts of Saturday Night" Tom Waits
"Drunk on the Moon" Tom Waits
"Mary Queen of Arkansas" Bruce Springsteen
"At Seventeen" Janis Ian
"Bird on the Wire" Leonard Cohen

To further demonstrate the effectiveness of imagery, I present to my class some of the more common themes of student poetry and show with each a contrast between a generalized statement that *tells* and an image that *shows*. (All images here are taken from poems by former students of mine. Initials follow images; full student names are at end of article.)

CHILDHOOD

General: I miss the days of childhood.
I have so many memories of childhood.

Images: Slip-proof daisies in a Mr. Bubble tub (P.M.)
Candy floss at the summer fair (B.F.)
Mom stirring cocoa over a hot stove (C.C.)
On the Long-John mornings of the month before the last,
secure in the Baggies between foot and boot,
I bounded into the virgin snow (P.M.)
(A time) before cross-my-heart became a bra and stick-a-needle-in-your-eye didn't risk infection (B.S.)

HOLIDAYS

General: Holidays were always a good time.

Images: I remember the aroma of roasting pheasant lingering past upturned noses of cousins, aunts, and uncles (Cr.C.)
Everyone . . . crowded in the kitchen on stools and counters, breaking and crumbling cashews for (fresh butter) toffee (B.S.)

NATURE

General: It was a cold winter day.
The day was a beautiful one.

Images: I was at the mercy of winter's frozen fury (J.Z.)
The sun rolled a tarpaulin of fog off the mountains, shovelling the mist out of dells (E.Y.)
The rising sun threw shadows from hawthornes, pine and birch (T.T.)
The air was as cold and dry as a perfect martini (E.Y.)
The wind punishes your face shrieking as through a hollow metal tube (J.Z.)

GRANDPARENTS

General: I felt such love for my grandparents.
Grandma had aged.

Images: She walked slowly around the checker-tiled kitchen, her feet weighted down by massive calves (C.C.)

Your hand, mapped with blue-veined contour lines and age spots, quivers (C.C.)

At night, dentures removed, "Mr. Prune Man" emerged amid screams of delight, your paunch, the cradle for my pajamaed exuberance (C.C.)

LOVE

General: I fell in love.
We were so much in love.
Do you love me?

Images: I wanted to see our arms intertwined in a champagne-glassed embrace (J.H.)

I wanted to swoop you down to my knee and shiver your body with a deep, Valentino-like caress (J.H.)

After sunrise skinny dips, we'll crawl into union-made longjohns and old blue jeans. Then, I'll sing you Chapin songs and you can bring me black-eyed susans (A.W.)

As students begin choosing specific topics, I encourage them to start simply, avoiding dramatic, earth-shattering events. I explain that an important skill is that of bringing freshness to a seemingly mundane topic. This proves helpful for various reasons:

1. The details come more easily when drawn from "everyday experience"
2. Students avoid disastrous first poems like "First Love" or "Grandpa's Death"
3. The nothing-big-ever-happened-in-my-life students are less intimidated
4. Since the topic doesn't seem inherently interesting, the focus shifts from content to use of language to create interest

Thus, the subject is not controlling the writer; the writer must control the subject and begin learning to control language.

ASSIGNMENT: Create a list of at least ten images (in phrases or sentences) that describe an experience from your past. Consider all the senses.

DAY ONE: While students create lists, I circulate through the room, asking questions about items on their lists, forcing them to greater specificity.

Example of Student List:

Travelling on Pullmans

— broken air conditioning and no showers

— warm red wool blankets
— fresh white tablecloths
— states whizzing by through green tinted windows
— Cajun cooks on the Panama Limited sneaking extra sausage under my steamy pancakes
— dewy red roses
— drunken old perverts claiming to be detectives
— train track clickety-clacks singing me to sleep
— moon-lit mountains

DAY TWO: Form circle for better listening.

a. Students begin reading their lists aloud.
b. After readings from five students, I ask class to name images they recall from each list just read. Writers are immediately reinforced.
c. Repeat process after each group of five.
d. I ask students to look around at class, recalling each list read, and to jot down five to ten most memorable individual images from any lists.
e. We quickly read out these brief lists and I make note of favorite class images.
f. I point out exactness and sensory appeal of favorites.

DAY THREE: We read more published poems, observing imagery and noting focus (time and space covered); style of language; and placement on the page (line and stanza breaks).

ASSIGNMENT, PART TWO: Work the best images from your list plus new ones equally strong into a unified whole, a poem focused on that past experience.

Example of student poem based on list of images:

Pullmans

Despite broken air conditioning
drunken old perverts
claiming to be detectives
and no showers,
I loved those Pullman trains.
Red wool blankets
were never too warm
just snug.
States whizzed by the green tinted windows,
Train track clickety-clacks
sang me to sleep

while moon-lit mountains and gulleys
and slightly rough track
rocked me away.
Cajun cooks on the Panama Limited
snuck me extra sausage
under steamy pancakes.
But white tablecloths
fresh from the hiss of an iron
and dewy red roses
are now Amtrak blue and red.
A browned carnation stands in dirty water;
Waiters in the microwave diner coldly demand:
"What do you want?"
and "No substitutions, please."
Only Pullman blankets remain unchanged;
brick-red, toasty warm,
the last remnants of old travel.

— ANN STOCKHAM

DAY FOUR: While students work on poems, I isolate spots where an image might better *show* what a line is *telling*. I also suggest tightening where needed.

DAYS FIVE & SIX: After revising is completed, I distribute some fine examples from class:

For Warmth

With buckle-up boots
And toes curled tight,
We break the crusted snow,
Our mouths full of scarf.

We follow Uncle Nate, and watch
As he lifts his broadaxe off his high, square shoulders
Standing it in the snow.
"This one big 'nuff for 'ya?" he bellows, pointing.
We nod in eagerness and for warmth
And gape at the towering pine.
With a corner he chisels away the outer bark,
His body tall, strong, and aged
Like the tree he begins to crack with measured strokes.

To the winter echo of his work,
He whacks and thumps the wood
Hurling chips through the cold,
His rugged right fist
Sliding from shaft to blade and back again
With each downward swing.
And when the tree begins to whine and buckle
We shout cheerful choruses of "Tim-BERRRR"
And duck behind the drifts.

Yearly,
We'd watch the trees sap his November strength,
But we knew the reward
With a warm fire, hot cider, and Uncle Nate.

— Jim Hauskey

These examples, of course, don't show the struggles that the less talented experience. For the student whose writing skills are far from honed, the writing of poetry can seem to be an almost insurmountable task. But by reinforcing through guidance and models the need for imagery, we can help any student create more concrete expression in writing. This reinforcing takes constant reminding on the part of the teacher and constant revising on the part of the student; however; the time investment is entirely worthwhile, for through being trained to create phrases that accurately record sensory experience, students gain precision in word choice, show greater care for their written work overall, and begin learning to more effectively control their written language. Once students make strides in that direction, they'll begin to, as Marianne Moore suggested, "have it." Then as long as they work with images, the "real toads" of poetry, they're ready to describe more complex gardens, as this last student does. Note her personalized handling of something as large as war.

Vietnam Through a Prism

Ribbons and fanfare wished goodbye
To the rows and rows of trained lambs . . .

Later we read vague letters from uncles, cousins, brothers.
But the rumble of war stayed over there.
As we swam crazy circles in the hot August sun,

The enemy's women sat in the yellow air
And couldn't sleep nights as they listened
To the rumble and watched
Their children's unsteady breathing.

As the crickets and ice cream bell gave in to the night
We slept like little calves, never knowing
About the napalm-splattered back that lay far away.

— ANNE CADIGAN

Note: Students from whose poems I lifted images for illustration: Carole Clark (CC), Craig Corday (CrC), Beth Foley, Jim Hauskey, Patty Marela, Betsy Spethmann, Tom Tremblay, Ann Wittke, Evan Young, and Jim Zrimsek

Sunbeams, Moonbeams and the Hard Realities

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Perhaps one of the easiest assignments for a teacher to give and the most difficult for the student to accomplish is one in creative writing. The results of that assignment can be disastrous. Even though a student's own experiences offer the best possibility for creative presentation, some students are convinced they have never lived through anything worth writing about or they become so emotionally involved in the experience, they cannot extract themselves and view it objectively. The teacher then must provide means for establishing a background if the student does not possess a ready-made idea. This preliminary work by both teacher and students determines the outcome. Instead of pretty pink flowers, star-filled skies, lost but lingering love, a 100-page tome identified as an unfinished novel, or two poetic lines accompanied by a note announcing "I never could write poetry," the writing can result in disciplined, finished products which communicate ideas and feelings and use clear imagery, precise wording and emotional control.

To create this disciplined product, student writers must have concrete, objective material from which to work. Even though they will use only a portion of the information and will fictionalize it,

they need a surplus of facts. In the last eight years, many of my students who were national, state and local writing winners came from a special English-History class composed of better than average students. The course coordinated American literature and American history, and the same students went from a class hour of English to a class hour of history.

The first semester emphasized expository writing. The second semester, with the focus on twentieth century American literature and history, introduced a major unit on creative expression. The students, using material from classes, composed successful poems, short stories, slide and film presentations, and short plays. The assignments encompasseed two weeks; the preparation took two to three months. The history teacher, Mr. Robert Freemon, taught units of two to three weeks in duration on topics such as industrialization, the Depression, the 20's, the limits of war, and America of the 1950's through the 1970's. These historical units emphasized the effect of events upon the human condition and values. During the same time period, I taught literature by genre: the short story, the poem, the drama, the film. In my classes which were not part of the English-History program, students while studying literature by genre were encouraged to find a theme — anti war, environmental problems, preservation of life, deprivation, lives of illusion, justice, etc. They were then given time to read about, view or listen to expository or creative works concerning these themes.

The poetry unit presented the general poetic forms available to the writer — free, blank and regular verse. Images, effective word choice, figures of speech were analyzed and discussed. The more time spent in a close analysis of the professional poems often meant less time correcting the amateur offerings. Students, amazed at Cummings' "anyone lived in a pretty how town," learn that unconventional language can be a medium for a commonly accepted idea which can be manipulated not only for meaning but for tone. Ransome's "Janet Waking" made the students aware of the importance of the single word — the multiple meanings it holds and its contribution to the main idea of the poem. Frost's blank and regular verse led to a lesson in scansion. Nursery rhymes, modern ballads, anything with a beat helped some students recognize the meter or cadence in poetry.

After being reminded that poetry does express an idea, students were asked to write four lines of poetry and were discouraged from turning in a completed masterpiece. Their four lines were highly criticized — meter needs improvement, word could be more precise, perhaps a more or less structured form would be better.

Since all students have several problems and specific teacher suggestions are made to eliminate the problem to refine the work, students generally accept the criticism and see the improvement that can be made. If the teacher can refer to a similar structure, word texture, or inventiveness in a poem already studied, the student is even more enthusiastic about re-working his attempt. A nice balance of criticism and encouragement is important, but the student needs to be told the truth and guided accordingly.

The short story unit was approached in the same way as the poetry unit. The students began by reading stories from Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck. The analysis ranged from sentence structure, effective descriptive words, images and symbols. Students were reminded that the short story has a theme and has its own condensation of ideas, manipulation of words and tone. All elements in the short story must relate to the central idea: characters must remain consistent, and endings must never be part of the "and then I woke up" family tree. As time and textbooks allow, the students read the comic, the tragic, the every-day and the shocking; they read from writers like Thurber, Porter, and Welty. By popular demand I included a mini-unit in science fiction. Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Flying Machine," and Benet's "By the Waters of Babylon" allowed the students to see a common, topical theme housed in a science fiction form. The assignment given to the students in the short story unit was to write the introductory paragraph of a short story. Their creativity was deliberately structured to follow the rules superimposed on these paragraphs. Within the introduction must be a setting, a mention of the main character, and a hint at the plot. These requirements gave the student the necessary and desired guidelines.

A short drama and film unit was structured in much the same way as the poetry and short story units. The students studied the technical aspects, read and viewed quality works, and wrote a ten-line dialogue for a one-act play, or a detailed outline for a two-five minute film which could be made without a cast of thousands or a C. B. DeMille budget. In these assignments the students were asked to include one sentence that expressed their theme.

After students have done these preliminary projects, they can usually see where their talents lie. If they fail to hold promise as poets, perhaps they see a great future in making a film. If an opening to a short story was highly praised, that student needs little encouragement to finish the project. Those who can see life's ironies can sometimes incorporate them into any one of the genres. Those who enjoy the comic, the science fictional, or the adventure are

offered the opportunity to choose that mode of expression. From the variety comes the selectivity; from the consciousness of the discipline of creativity comes the confidence in the individual expression. The final creation of each student always surprises me. Their varying needs for the amount of help I give and their topic choices, with the accompanying attitudes, concerns and insights, often exceed my expectations but never my demands and afford me pleasure in their success.

When I asked one of my students, Laurie Paul, to tell me how she started with a less-than-ten-line-reject and finished with a local prize-winning poem, she told me her original problem was the typical narrowing of the topic and the organizing of ideas. Moved by the events concerning the assassination of John F. Kennedy, she was at first unable to control the amount of material she acquired in history class. She needed visual presentation of the events in her mind. In the library she examined five news photos and noted the details which became integral parts of her poem. Not satisfied with her drafts, she came to Mr. Freemon and to me on several occasions to request further direction. Her final project included three poems entitled "Texas Welcome," "Motorcade," and "The Procession." In "Texas Welcome" she notes Kennedy's arrival and comments

> Blinded by dreams
> To explore . . . stars,
> Conquer . . . deserts,
> Eradicate disease.
> His life was unrehearsed, spontaneous,
> Threatened.

She opens "Motorcade" by catching the police guard:

> Leading the promenade,
> Hinge-jointed officers
> Perched on shiny tin cycles . . .

and she closes "The Procession" with a view of the Kennedy casket —

> Strips of red and white
> A patch of blue
> Boldly draped
> Over a memory.

The careful detail, the controlled attitude, the clarity of image reflected the serious preparation, the hours of solitude, and the newly-formed critical eye of the student writer.

Careful preparation, encouragement, critical comment, specific suggestions for improvement are all part of the teacher's formula for molding the "creative writer." But the satisfaction of both teacher and writer with the final product of good quality is worth the many hours of solitude and suffering. When students return long after graduation and ask if they may send a teacher some of their more recent and more polished pieces of writing, the teacher knows that even with the change of material the discipline has created true disciples of the written word who know their work will still be read by a critical but appreciative eye.

Composing Original Poetry: From the Many Come a Few

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You see I need to write this poem,
So I don't see a *D* slip home.
And now at last the time has come;
This poem for English class is done.
— high school junior

Few high school students compose poetry voluntarily, and those enrolled in creative writing courses or clubs are not necessarily the best writers. Hence, requiring all students to compose poetry insures that all will share in the creative process and that some will write well. Of course, teachers must provide instruction before they require students to write.

The method I find most satisfactory is incorporating poetry writing into another unit. For example, I have required freshmen to write animal poetry as part of a unit on encyclopedias and outlining. After they had been introduced to three general encyclopedias — *World Book Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia Americana,* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* — and to outlining skills, all students chose animals to research. They read from these three reference books, took notes, and prepared animal outlines. To culminate the unit, they wrote original animal poetry. Before they wrote their poems, however, we studied other animal poems composed by former students and by professionals: Ciardi's "Beagles," Merriam's

"Ululation," Sandburg's "Buffalo Dusk," Fearing's "Some Brown Sparrows," and Cummings' "Me up it does." One of the better poems written for this unit was entitled "Mephitinae" and opened with this stanza:

> Would you believe my funny friend
> Is black and white and smelly?
> With pointed nose and bushy tail
> And fat and furry belly?

Another freshman poem entitled "Massive Mystery" read:

> Huge grey mountain,
> Long slinky trunk,
> Rough wrinkled skin.
> floppy ears,
> padded feet,
> Skinny swinging tail,
> White ivory tusks,
> An Elephant, of course!

Using current events is another way to incorporate the writing of poetry into a unit. During the 1975-76 school year, my two junior classes and I focused on the Bicentennial. We purchased *Life Magazine's The 100 Events That Shaped America* and discussed those episodes. We analyzed Whitman's poem "I Hear America Singing" and imitated Whitman's style, using events listed in the special *Life* issue. After studying other patriotic poems, all students composed America poems. One entitled "Spirit of '76" began:

> I was born
> of oppression and sorrow
> long ago
> I burned
> in men's hearts
> there in the snow of Valley Forge
> I have seen
> people live for me
> great ones
> with names like Washington
> Jefferson, Lincoln
> and small ones
> whose names are inscribed
> on the land
> with toil and sweat....

and ended:

> and as my years approach
> two hundred
> they remember me well
> for they are America
> I have cradled and nurtured them
> I have urged them on
> I have seen them
> through all the diversity of their
> fortune
> I see them in greatness now
> And I will see them
> in greatness yet
> I am their
> Spirit of '76.

One boy's parents were so proud of his bicentennial poem entitled "The Quilt" that they commissioned a calligrapher to copy the poem, framed it, and presented it to him as a birthday present.

Requiring students to compose sonnets after studying Shakespeare's sonnets is a third way to incorporate poetry writing into another unit. Last school year (1979-80), my two senior classes and I analyzed Shakespeare's sonnets (concentrating on numbers 18, 29, 30, 55, 73, 105, 116, 130, and 147), noting Shakespeare's varied techniques. They memorized four of his sonnets, writing the lines in class, and then composed their own sonnets, revising if necessary. Most of the sonnets were satisfactory, and some even soared. One of my favorites entitled "Sonnet 7½AA" read:

> Everywhere I look, I see a foot.
> The customers are swarming through the door.
> A fat old lady struggles with a boot.
> 'Tis 7:00 again at our shoe store.
> The people only want what we don't have.
> The boss will have a fit whate'er I do.
> A man's galosh is stuck around his calf,
> And two seats down a lady's foot turns blue.
> The smell of sweaty feet wafts through the air
> As some old geezer yells some phrases rude.
> Kids frolic 'round the shelves without a care
> And drop small bits of candy, partly chewed.
> But if I quit, I'd soon be filled with woe,
> For then my mom would hock my stereo.

At times I feel guilty for taking any credit for teaching students to write creatively. Usually my best student poems are ones I have had little to do with other than requiring that they be written. Hence my original thesis: require of all, and from the many will come a few.

After the students have composed original poetry, I provide audiences for them. The best examples are shared with classmates in classroom activities, with schoolmates through the school newspaper or school literary magazine, and with the rest of the world through local, state, and national writing contests. I have found creative flowers rarely enjoy blushing unseen and wasting their sweetness on the desert air.

"Consider, Watson, The Great Issues Which Hang from a Bootlace"

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The central task, the hardest, most unrelenting, most painful necessity for the beginning poet is to immerse himself in detail.

This insight I owe to a junior/senior elective for regular (that is, not honor) students which I have taught since 1972. The course was originally an introduction to modern poetry, whose techniques, it seemed to me, could be understood best by attempting them. Although the course soon evolved into a writing course, I like to remember my original goal of understanding poetry, for I need not dwell on the fact that very few of my students call themselves poets. Although the course attracts an occasional student of outstanding talent, for the most part the enrollment is inexperienced, tense before poetry itself, and more so before the writing of poetry. The students without exception have a concept of poetry as intensely private, intensely free expression.

I think in awe of the dictates of Mr. Higginson, whose understanding of the genre was so firm that he declined the name of poetry to the work of Dickinson on account of lapses in meter, rhyme, and vocabulary. Since Emily's time, assaults on convention have triumphed. If we postpone for the present the task of sorting out an intriguing sack of typographical, visual, syntactical, and surrealist innovations, the largest volume of modern poetry seems at base a variety of prose, more easily defined in terms of effect

than of form. This writing usually retains from tradition the line-by-line separation of units of meaning, and a sort of conversational meter, but its irreducible art consists of a deliberate boiling down of experience to its most evocative detail.

The beginner's idea of poetry, even that serious young person with the worn journal of hand-cut suede, is permissive in the extreme. Aside from the fact that his ideas are swaddled in generality, a phenomenon to which I have given much thought, his structure and grammar are casual to the point of disfunction: He writes in unattached participles, does not use finite verbs, shifts point-of-view (his base of observation), floats disembodied on a featureless landscape. He stirs the fog with whimsical punctuation, oddities in spacing and syllabication, as a rule derived from E. E. Cummings.

My own belief is that beginning instruction in the writing of poetry should encourage compressed, stripped down, but literate sentences with sharp undeviating focus. Otherwise, a semester of writing poetry indulges the student in relaxed egocentrics which cannot be measured against any standard, and which are actually destructive to the broader aims of the English curriculum.

My conviction notwithstanding, at the exact moment my class assembles, I feel my pedantry giving way.

In the glare of the January sun, which slices my walls with shadows from old blinds, I make the annual re-discovery that linguistics must recede (temporarily) before the more serious barrier to the writing of poetry, which is timidity, even cowardice, before life itself. I can teach the difference between detail and generality, often in one period, but logic does not interrupt the student's retreat to the vague. The detail is truth, and truth is the knife which cannot be prevented from cutting. As May Swenson's powerful line grimly advises, "Stop or I will sink in deeper."

Listen to Colleen, a student worth her weight in dactyls because she shares her journal; "Wondering/looking/thinking/remembering/crying/why?/why?/oh why?"

I know without looking that these musings form a skinny column down the page, isolated in appearance as in grammar. I know that although Colleen has never considered the power of the finite verb, that is not why she never constructs one. She prefers the infinite compass of thinkings and cryings. Approving voices murmur, "I've felt like that." I realize that I cannot treat, even delicately, on this warm amorphism. I dare not ask the finite question: "What, exactly, were you crying about?" Not at the moment, but later I ask. "I had this friend from sixth grade who moved to Bogota.

When I got a letter from her, even though I never liked her that much, I cried." How evocative, how poetic. Colleen prefers, and alas, so do her classmates, the elegiac, "Why, oh why?"

(I must concede here, lest I be thought a severely limited student of poetry, that in practiced hands abstractions are elegant tools: the language of Theodore Roethke's villanelle, "I wake to sleep and take my waking slow/I learn by going where I have to go" or the extrapolated grief of Dylan Thomas' villanelle, "Do not go gently into that good night." Such works have philosophical bite, grammatical precision, as well as rigorous form.)

The problem in a nutshell is to produce details and to insulate against them.

The two processes are antithetical: first and continually, confront the students with experience; and concurrently, attempt technical control over the feelings which result. These two necessities, antithetical or not, cannot be evaded. Dickinson said that poetry is an explosion; Frost said poetry is a moment of order in the chaos of the universe. Wordsworth had already combined these two ideas in his famous definition of poetry as strong emotion recalled in moments of tranquillity.

The control, or insulation, which works best for me is a simple technical language.

I have used many sorts of technical assignments from working from models to working from form poems (models reduced to pattern). But the simplest, and least demanding in its level of abstraction, is a sequence of so-called "techniques of compression," which the students remember from the eighth-grade blackboard with Miss Horckstorck's command: SAVE. These terms are the bones of an agenda, and as imperfectly as we see their contours week by week, give us what share we have of totality. For those who may be interested, I list the terms and poems which are samples from a repertoire of examples:

Enumeration: "A View of Things" by Edwin Morgan
Sensory Distortion: "Root Cellar" by Theodore Roethke
Understatement: "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" by John Crowe Ransome
Overstatement: "Auto Wreck" by Karl Shapiro
Irony: "Christ Came Down" by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Personification (Animation): "I Like to See It Lap the Miles" by Emily Dickinson
Meter: "Fern Hill" by Dylan Thomas
Onomatopoeia: "Tarentella" by Hilaire Belloc
Spatial Arrangement: "Cherrylog Road" by James Dickey

Ellipsis (Implied Narrative): "If Anything Happens" by E. E. Cummings
Climax: "The Arrival of the Bee Box" by Sylvia Plath
Anticlimax: "The End of the World" by Archibald Mac Leish
Symbol: "The Dirty Word" by Karl Shapiro
Metaphor: "The Examination" by W. D. Snodgrass
Juxtaposition: "Screened Porch in the Country" by James Dickey

In addition to the above, I use student poems. They provide the very best examples, and I have inexhaustible files.

In practice, these techniques do not roll out in orderly presentation. Everything works in combination, never in isolation. Some of the more esoteric-sounding labels are the most immediately useful. For instance, ellipsis, that wilful omission of grammar or narrative elements which the reader can infer, is a marvelous help in unloading a ponderous hunk of prose. Juxtaposition of incongruous detail is a most dependable source of surrealist depth.

I would like to illustrate the advantage of technical language which is neutral, accommodating, and inoffensively authoritative.

The class is several weeks old. The sun, which filled the room, has retreated such a distance that when we measure it, the class gasps. "What's this?" I ask a student, who hands me a piece written with thick green (symbolic) marker. "That's my sensory distortion." She stands tentatively. The piece is a bitter denunciation of an adult, readily seen to be mom, who slouches about the house all day in a bath robe. "Green," the writer has specified boldly, "which is your favorite color, but to me is slime." Now I ask you, what can I say about these specifics on which I have insisted? That the poem is a self-indulgent attack, I cannot discuss at all, except from a technical distance. The student and I can talk about the impact of words like *slime;* we can wonder whether distortion sacrifices literal truth for emotional truth; we can get close to the content without judging the attitude of the writer.

In talking about technical language first, I have reversed priorities; the first task of the writing class is to generate content. Most generating activities fall in one of four categories: (1) entering in the daily journal (first five minutes of every class); (2) unlocking the model poems (a first-of-the-week task); (3) staging the "sociality" of the week (a high energy middle-of-the-week release); (4) writing the communal poem from that sociality (rule: there is no place to hide).

All these generating activities are meshed with the technical focus of the week as closely as possible. To illustrate, start with enumera-

tion, the actual starting point for the class, the most simple of the techniques, the most relentlessly specific, money back guaranteed to produce the raw stuff of poetry.

1. **The Journal.** The Class makes its first attempt at enumeration in the daily journal. I can hear you asking, "Journal?" "Each entry written in a felt tip of a different color to impart mercurial moodiness to entries composed at a sitting?" No, that kind of journal is not much help, and furthermore, a tottering stack of them, dripping quotations from Rod McKuen, is beyond management. The daily journal that I require is quite different. Write for five minutes. Write to music (Vivaldi inevitably gives way to rock). Write to Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World:" I feel the urging of rough grass, of windborn insects, of trembling arms, of my house on the hill." Write about the taste of penny candy: "Remember licorice whips, salt water taffy, jujubies, crackerjacks (peanuts and prize), bull's eyes, turtles, pixies, sugar babies, snow caps, the great American chocolate bar — oh, remember red M and M's." Write to the sound of ice in a glass: "Chinese silk and snow, a gazebo of a bluff, a screened porch on a summer afternoon, incense like hyacinths, silvered wheat fields, Chinese silk and snow." All stimuli lose their force; some are as transitory as May flies. But there is no end to them.

As the class reads from the entries in a quick round robin from which there must be no escape, it not only builds fine enumeration; it begins to break those stereotypical barriers to its own rich diversity. Freak, burn-out, brain, snob, jock, Larry-lover, these dehydrations, which make an irritant of the very air, give way to Sarah, who wrote that line about the marshmallows in the plastic bag: "I can feel the little kittens in the momma cat." Oh wow, Sarah!

2. **Model Poems.** The second generative device is unlocking the model poems, done theatrically rather than studiously. The poems which illustrate enumeration are ideal for improvisation. Read them line by line, add choral refrains, put in solos, contrive antiphonies. Chaotic sometimes, amateurish always, the theatrics break down inhibitions, and develop skills adaptable to more complex problems. Choral reading is the natural way to hear rhythm and onomatopoeia. Playmaking highlights the structural climax in Dickey's "Screened Porch in the Country," and the anti-climax in Swensons' "The Lowering," which can actually be pantomimed, so meticulous is May's flag etiquette. When we come to considerations of tone, as in Frost's "Out, out," individual readers emerge to project with their voices hypothetical speakers.

The best model poems make a simple entry into the student's experience. "Simple" extends its dimension as the class grows in sophistication. Why, think of that class last semester, confidently "into explication," which disposed of Dickey's "Cherrylog Road" in a single period. The poem was abrasive to their sense of (classroom) propriety; they pronounced its imagery gross (read erotic) and insultingly obvious. " 'Black snake curves into action.' Oh, man." Do I hint to them that the black snake is more than a male symbol? Or send them to dig deeper in the interstices of the junk yard for the life-in-death imagery? Of course, such injunction is a professional necessity. But cautiously. A poem is not an artifact. "Hidden meanings" are ghostly excavations.

3. **The Socialities.** Now we come to the non-academic activities to which I have been committed since the days when sitting on the floor tuned the pulse to rebellion. Today, these enterprises are risky. "School is not the place to fly," opines a student from his reflective tilt at the back of the room. Even general enthusiasm will not garner everyone. Still, a new and startling context is a powerful release of communal feeling, public individuality, and private memory.

A ride in a tractor tire, a walk to St. Mary's Cemetery (and rubbings from its stones), an improvised rhythm band, bag stories at Sheridan Elementary, duck-duck-goose on the lawn, painting the old railroad viaduct, ballet exercises (creative rest, says Johanne), finger painting, a blindfold safari, kites in April, storybook day, object letters (see Kipling) and so on, and on. Socialities generate content about which the class can write communally without self consciousness, and sometimes stir private memories too strong to resist.

We must move along several weeks to try the first sociality, so that comfortable familiarity has expanded in our yellow sunlight. We are working on sensory distortion, and have improvised Swenson's "Centaur," William Stafford's "Fifteen," and Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill." We have decided to return to childhood by way of a birthday party, one of the few events which I have ever repeated.

A competent, thoroughly junior-senior committee will have seen to cake and punch, streamers, presents, hats, and pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. Very soon, the efficiency begins to collapse, and a noisy disorder of little kids appears. Voices regress, theatrically to an extent, like the inebriate who pretends palsy, but is in truth unsteady. Pam pours candy into her mouth. "Greedy," shouts Chris. "I got a book," lisps Alison, "too bad I can't wead." Libby goes wild with giant crayons. "Don't dare break the points." On the

fringes are the timid, retreating as they always used to do. In the middle is Pat, imitating his father, calling, "Children, children," and measuring the cake slices. Even I am genuinely back with preschoolers, fretting about the crumbs.

I can say parenthetically that I like to work with evocations of childhood, for the adolescent has much better control over early experiences than over more recent events. Although I have received stunning love poetry, successful treatment of emotion still tumultuous is rare.

4. **The Communal Poem.** The philosophy of the communal work which follows the week's sociality is the same as that guiding the reading from the journals: there is no place to hide. Let's hear it for the poet in the corner. There are many ways of working up a communal poem, and no end to the structural revisions which can often approach genuine poetry. Even the most simple enumeration presses questions of sequence, of tone, often of symbol. I like to type the lines on a ditto as I hear them, and repairing quickly to the teacher's workroom, run the ditto off, and hand it back in the same period.

The communal work which follows evocations of childhood is likely to be simple nostalgia: "Remember when you were safe if you touched the tree roots by the fence? Remember when Miss Zitzowitz put Robert in the garbage can, and you threw ice cream plates right on top of him? Remember when you brought a present, and cried when you had to give it up? Remember when Miss Kawdlin said a true friend tells another friend when she has orange peel in her braces?"

But individual work, when it comes in, may have a different range from that of the communal effort. It is often dark, inexplicable: "On the twelve feet/of wrapping paper/fingerpaints have dried like blood/The shriveled paper/totally intensed by red smears/sounds like a fire."

Spring finds our companionable sun bright on the forsythia bushes outside our window. We have dittoed off a class magazine, and as bees fly in and out of our open window, sit reading what each has submitted as his best work. Has our class produced any poets? Only time will tell us that. A profusion of poetic detail, that we have on record. A fearlessness before poetry, we have heard in voices which still echo. And a confidence of taste, a sense of craft, that I will discover, should I have the good fortune to encounter these students next year.

Poetry Is Process

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Poetry is one of many instruments for the understanding of intellectual and emotional truth. When considering the writing of poetry, therefore, it is fundamental that it be seen as a part of a process of intellectual and emotional investigation and discovery, not as an end result, a perfect product. This process is made up of a series of acts which can be critiqued and revised without damaging the essential integrity of the poetry itself.

If poetry is process, and a poem, as Verlaine has had, "is never finished, but abandoned," the teacher, as critic, and the student, as poet, must have a shared understanding of this definition of poetry. Also needed is a clear critical language to evaluate the degree of success of that process, that poem. The establishment of a critical working vocabulary that is precise will allow the teacher to focus on the use of language rather than on content. By concentrating on the nuances of style and not the evaluation of emotional states, the teacher can diminish the fears that students hold of having their "inner-feelings" critiqued. The defining of such a workable critical language is therefore a crucial step in the teaching of the crafting of poetry.

For beginning secondary students, the umbrella term "figurative language" can prove useful. It is not as broad a term as "creative writing," for again it focuses not on the content of a writing assignment, but on the manner in which it is to be written. Figurative language assignments result in student work that is both poetry and prose; they may choose the form in which they work. Figurative language assignments, then, can encompass such terms as imagery, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, sensory language, or other more specific figures of speech. Creative drill exercises, in the mastery of these more specific terms, one at a time, begin to focus the student's attention on manner, rather than on content of expression. The process of writing, critiquing and revising figurative language is slowly removed from the arena of a student's inner-life or feelings.

The first step in such a process of establishing a working critical language is to use it with students in a number of exercises or assignments so that they can learn its definitions. Beginning assignments can be to describe in words how a person, place, or object feels, tastes, sounds, smells, and appears. Students must use at

least one sentence per sense. These may be poetic or prose pieces. This exercise stimulates imaginative thinking and fresh word-play. Each one of the five senses is discussed and examples in writing are cited: "The locker room *tasted* like sweat." "The library *reeked* of humid, old papers." "The asphalt *shone* with fall rain."

Once the senses are clear to the students and the use of vivid verbs rather than adjectives has been discussed, a more complex assignment is given. The assignment is to create a complete picture in words of a person, place, or situation. Again, these pieces may be poems or prose. Students are given the same assignment a number of times, and each assignment is checked in but not graded. They are, however, critiqued. Effective use of figurative language is lauded, underlined. The sense or senses being referred to are pointed out. Vague, trite, or general terms such as "nice," "warm," "lovely," "beautiful" are crossed out, circled, or questioned. Students are to appeal to all five senses in each piece. In as few as three assignments, significant movement towards figurative writing occurs. No comment is made on content. During this period students' attitudes change. They begin to feel that figurative writing is an intellectual as well as an emotive process.

Successful student work can be duplicated, read to the class, and praised. This is a most powerful form of reinforcement. Some work must be presented anonymously. Soon, however, most students will wish to claim their work, for they like to be known for witty or effective word play once the bounds of criticism are clearly delineated and their feelings protected.

Finally, an assignment can be given to be graded on very clear, specific, and mutually understood criteria. Most poets at this time will be trying free verse, though some will try to meet the three disciplines of rhyme, meter, and imagery. Modern verse then also becomes accessible and can be read successfully in class, for students have learned a specific, critical approach.

But what is the integrative principle behind and beneath these exercises and activities? How does one justify this sort of approach to the students? The key is that students begin to grasp the fact that the more specifically and in detail a person, place, or situation is reproduced, the more power and impact the writing possesses. Most students already know that figurative writing "works" better; they simply need reinforcement of this understanding and practice as to how to achieve the skill.

Gradually students can begin to comprehend poetry as process. They simply cannot write about everything that they wish to write about in one poem. They realize how difficult it is to render even

the simplest experience on paper, but with the proper selection of detail they can learn how such writing can have great emotional and suggestive power. They can then also accept the need for revision and rewriting and successfully separate a piece of writing from their feelings. They begin to see real proof as to the mystery and complexity of their own life.

Seeing this complexity, students are ready to return to models that particularly emphasize figurative language for analysis and examination. The pungent image, the striking, colorful line, the startling use of new, vivid language can all be used to emphasize the ways in which published writers employ the techniques which students are learning. The use of contemporary, folk, rock, soul, or jazz lyrics with music is usually very effective. Lyrics on a transparency, examined for the use of "figurative language" and imagery and then heard, add to the students' critical and listening skills and open new doors to the appreciation of poetry as music. The work of James Taylor, Joni Mitchell (in her *For the Roses* album, especially), Judy Collins, Stevie Wonder, Bob Dylan, Richie Havens, and others abound with the exciting use of figurative language. Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes, Ezra Pound, E. E. Cummings, among many others, are poets to be read for stunning imagery. Paperback collections such as Nancy Larrick's *On City Streets* and the books of Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* and *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese*, are full of varied examples.

Boris Pasternak defined the poet as a "man who lives." When students first begin to seek language to picture in sensory and figurative imagery their experiences, the processes of poetry become tools for the expression and exploration of their realities. The forms and aesthetics of poetry soon become the prisms that add regularity and coherence to image and figurative speech. When students begin to see the advantages of specificity and definition in their writing and appreciate the added beauty of rhythm, rhyme and form, they become poets. Content emerges. The critical process becomes one of examination of the process of perception itself, and, as Frost said, "poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom."

Show Me Your Dream

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One day, to paraphrase Saroyan, in the good old days when I was under forty, when "relevance" and "spontaneity" were the buzz words, and teaching writing was an exciting challenge, we invented a course called Individualized Composition. The redundancy of the title seemed necessary to set it apart dramatically from Composition I and that ilk. It was a course in which students would write about subjects that interested them. The teacher would edit the paper immediately and the writer would rewrite it until the editor-teacher thought that student-writer had said what he wanted to say clearly and interestingly. We wanted to convince each student, no matter how barren he believed his existence was, that he had something interesting to say; we wanted to move him from, "I ain't got nothing to say." to "Listen, I want to tell you this!" One of the teachers assigned to this course, Kathy Chopra, was an acquaintance of Larry Woiwode, novelist and poet. She wrote to him asking for advice about what to tell young writers. This was his reply:

> If I had a choice of what I could do for a young writer, it would be to make him realize, somehow, that he must not write outside his realm of knowledge. I did it for years myself (how about a jet pilot on a mission over Korea?) and I know how much I lied and wasted time and tortured myself, and all because I figured I was so stupid no one would want to hear what I did know. Then an older writer at *The New Yorker*, William Maxsell, became interested in me because of something of mine he'd read and told me, more or less, to quit messing around, though kindly — he's one of the gentlest men I know — and right after that, after he gave me many books to read and hours of his time I'd like to be able to say that I sat down and did exactly what he said, but I didn't. I kept on writing the same crap, pretentious and untrue, totally unbelievable because I was talking out of my realm; and then one day, much later, I sat down in a flop-house in New York and wrote a little sketch about my grandmother, crying all the way through because she was such a lovely woman and was dead, and that was the first story of mine *The New*

Yorker took. But I felt so good about it I didn't care whether anybody took it or not. I was free and honest and finally at my ease and I had her right.

You can only write about what you know.

Individualized still exists, but not many students take it anymore. The new buzz words are the very old ones: uniformity, ability grouping, traditional grammar, sequence, minimal competency. Students are now registering for Comp I and that ilk. Nevertheless, a course in which students can feel free and honest and be at ease in spite of editorial demands for revisions and the insistence on deadlines, a course in which someone does want to hear what the students do know, seems necessary to meet the needs of some students who do have a tale to tell and feelings to share. Here it is called Creative Writing Workshop and the Woiwode letter is still lesson number one.

Lesson number two leads into a unit on short story writing, which I will not elaborate on here since our immediate concern is with poetry. I wish only to mention that I tackle the teaching of the craft of verse only after my students have found their voice in prose.

The most effective method I have found of helping students to write poetry is a response cycle. At the beginning of each week or cycle (of any length) we read a group of poems about a single subject: war, dreams, death, love, etc. Students can respond to the poems in one of four ways. They can find a poem about the same subject. They can write a personal essay about what the poem made them think and feel. They can write a critical essay analyzing the poem. Or best of all, they can write a poem of their own on the same subject or a poem on any subject using the same structure as one of the poems read at the beginning of the cycle. The last day of the cycle is response day; students read their poems and essays. Before long, most of the students choose to write their own poems, but they always know that they can respond in other ways.

When the system works well, it goes like this. At the end of one cycle we used in 1974, someone read a poem about an old house. That became the subject of the next cycle. On response day, one student read a personal essay about spending a morning in the attic of her grandmother's house; another student read a poem by Jennie Romano called "Old Houses" and in response to that poem another student, Fran Hersh, for the next cycle wrote this poem called "New Houses," which appeared in the *Illinois English Bulletin* late spring issue of 1975.

New Houses

shiny black Cadillacs introduce
overwhelming fumes of windex
and endust
in a demonstrative front room hall
where the Van gogh paintings
on the otherwise barren walls
of a home that reeks
with pride.
white rectangles left to hide
in imaginary corners
open for the public's view,
imported antiques
smothered in ironic dust,
lamps and ashtrays
labeled "Do not touch" —
shiny white shoes
pleading recognition.

A cycle that began with the reading of Henry Reed's "The Naming of Parts" was followed by the discovery of a poem in a Bantam paperback, *The Good Life, U.S.A.:*

Today We Will Study

"Today we will study the fifth declension."
Outside the declining sun flares and casts
A red glow on the blackboard. "Now class!"
On the trees the brown leaves shine like patterned glass.

"Now we will study mass in suspension."
Outside the very world is suspended in ice, glass
Glazed, caught in crystals, flash and flash past,
And all is streamed in light, "And suspended mass . . ."

"Now we will study the spring and its tension."
Outside the world is spring and green tension
Breaks and splashes on the sun-cut grass.
All life ru hes out, "See how fast . . ."

"Everyone watch, and Peter, pay attention!"
Outside the unattended world slips past.

— Peter Ryan (p. 29)

To which Mark Mann, one of the students in the class responded:

To Peter

Today you will study the sensitive motion
Of breeze-swept spruce, of fingers of grass.
Inside eyes glare at times that won't pass
While a newborn monarch laughs "free at last, free at last."

Now you will feel your love in explosion,
As you scent juniper, note the shadow you've cast
Inside its numbers and debate of the past
As the crimsons of cardinals flash and flash past.

Now you will give undivided devotion
To the sun who invites you to flare out and cast
Your soul to the wind, your love to the last;
Your inside is out, time's a thing of the past.

"Everyone watch, it's Peter in motion.
All life rushes out, see how fast . . ."

A cycle that began with poems about God produced this cynical poem by Susan Phillips:

Makeshift Temples

They told me:
"It's your turn to be God today."
And I said, "Who me?"
. . . .
So it's my turn to be
exalted
blamed
disclaimed
congratulated
expiated and discussed in excess

By those in question, doubt or distress
and yes, dismissed.
Until my turn is up
and another takes up
the mysterious ways.

This metaphysical by Steve Glabman:

God is a concept
By which we measure our pain,
Because we all need
Someone else to blame.

And this direct address by Peggy Burns:

Say, God,
I want to tell
You I think
You really tried
to give us something
unique and functional,
and that I'm sorry that
Your experiment is disintegrating.
It was enjoyed
(and yes, abused)
while it lasted.
I thank You for
Your trial (which is our
error.)

A fundamental rule is that poetry must be read aloud by its author. Timid at first, most students will eventually feel free to ask for clarification, to question either form or content, to give and receive criticism gracefully.

Between the first readings and the student responses we do concern ourselves with matters of sound, rhythm and rhyme, metaphor, symbols and what you will. We also consider some of the traditional forms such as the haiku, cinquain, ballad, sonnet and the villanelle. I usually insist that some of the student poetry be in one or more of these forms because I believe that fixed structures require the writer to say things he might otherwise never have thought of saying.

A good introduction to the technical aspects of poetry is a choral reading of Sandburg's "Jazz Fantasia." Not only is it fun (I do it on opening day!), it also can produce a lively discussion of free verse, image and metaphor, and the relationship between sound and sense.

Another effective opening is a reading of "Chin's Thirty-three Happy Moments" from Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living* (John Day Co., New York, 1937):

To cut with a sharp knife a bright green watermelon on a big scarlet plate of a summer afternoon. Ah, is this not happiness?

It is a summer day. I go bareheaded and barefooted, holding a parasol to watch young people singing Soochow folk songs while treading the water wheel. The water comes up over the wheel in a gushing torrent like molten silver or melting snow. Ah, is this not happiness?

pp. 130-136

Such moments can be turned into short poems. They can also inspire students to write some short poems about their own moments of happiness.

It is of course axiomatic that the teacher try out all of these exercises on his/her own. One of the best sources I have found of poem-producing exercises is in Stephanie Gray's *Steps to Poetry: Fifty Spirit Masters* (J. Weston Walch, Publisher, Portland, Maine). One of the more productive of these dittos is the following exercise in metaphor:

1. Focus on an image of some object or scene which you can imagine clearly. Describe this image briefly in words which sound well together.
2. Think about what that image reminds you of — what you might compare it to. Write another image which will communicate the comparison you thought of.
3. Show the basis for the comparison you have made by indicating some way(s) in which the first and second image are alike.
4. Decide how you feel about the object or scene you are writing about. Indicate your feelings in a line or two.

For example:

Water beetles skimming the still surface of the water
Like tiny skaters gliding round the rink,
Just one small push of their feet easing them forward until
They are dizzy with motion—
Me, I have always kept both feet on the ground.

Anon. student.

My homework on this exercise by Stephanie Gray came out like this:

She holds the paper slightly up and stares,
a blind Narcissus, a catatonic clone,
still hand, unblinking eyes, face and paper
with no identifying marks or scars.
She thinks: "I haven't got a thing to say."
And disengaged she slips away.
I scream so no one hears: "Show me
the dream you're in right now," And turn
to make red lines and circles yet once more.

And when you have spent two or three hours making your zillionth red line and circle, sighing and swearing that next year you will become a monk, suddenly you turn to the latest batch of student poems and you read one like this by Jon Zarov:

In My Den Door Shut Tightly Window Shades Drawn

In my den
Door shut tightly
Window shades drawn

I sweat.

Thieves and advertisers
Steal my words.

So many vanished
from sweetness:
Quasar, Zenith, and Sunbeam.
They can have Motorola and Chromacolor.
Leave me Jaguar, Eagle, and Greyhound.
Cornered,
I snarl my last unadulterated words
Xenophobia, clavicle, pontificate!
Hydrated, corpulent, celluloid!
Poor dinner for a poet.

We are the dispossessed.
We form long lines
And beg for virgin words
From nuns with ladles and
Empty pots.

Leave us alone.
We have suffered enough at the
Hands of word mangling computer experts
And fifth grade grammar teachers
Who rapped our knuckles
And raped our drifting minds.

When you have killed the poets
And buried the eyes of your children,
Remember
All we wanted was
the sunset.

Ah, is this not happiness.

A Winning Environment

CURTIS CROTTY
MALCOLM E. STERN
EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

Evanston Township High School has had its share of winners in various writing contests. Some of that success for our students is surely due to superior students and teachers. But these teachers and those students work in a total environment that encourages excellence in writing; supported by a helpful administration, the English Department itself has established policies about creative writing and about writing contests which lead to successful writing. Here are some:

1. The school district requires four years of English for graduation.
2. The English Department offers a four-year sequential composition program for each of its ability levels.
3. Creative writing is a requirement for every English course: this means that students must do it and teachers must teach it.
4. The department policy regarding writing contests is printed in the department syllabus:

> Each student should be given the opportunity to revise and polish a piece of writing for entry in a contest. Students see a teacher's confidence in their

writing ability when they are expected to submit their best writing to a different audience for reading. Teachers and students know of course that only a few pieces of writing will win any given contest, but it is a mistake for teachers to give the impression to a class that no writing in the class is capable of even being considered. Being asked to enter a contest is a compliment to a student's skills, whatever the level of those skills; even being asked to enter can be a source of positive motivation for a student.

5. The department syllabus lists due dates for six or seven of the most important contests and awards open to our students; e.g., Scholastic, Stephens College, Interlochen, IATE, etc.
6. In the spring of each year the English Department sponsors a theater production featuring dramatization in various forms of writing done by students in English classes during the year. The popular show, which runs for nearly a week, features writing by twenty or so students and has a cast of about ten. We call it Writer's Showcase. The full script is available at the production for purchase by students, parents, faculty.
7. We publish annually in the spring, a magazine of creative writing called *Evanescence*. This magazine is given to all students at Evanston Township High School.
8. In the spring the English Department sponsors an all-school writing contest for each level of each course taught in the department. Awards are given in two categories at each grade/ability level: prose and poetry. We offer 28 first prizes and 28 second prizes. All winners receive department certificates; in addition, first prize winners receive money, and second prize winners receive books. This awards program is supported financially by our school administration.
9. We present to our most outstanding senior or seniors a sizable monetary award. Named after a former Evanston Township High School teacher, Mary L. Taft, this award goes to the senior who, besides being an excellent English student, uses English skills with excellence outside the classroom — such as on the newspaper or yearbook staffs, in speech or drama, etc.

10. On a Wednesday afternoon in late May, the Evanston Township High School English Department honors all of its award-winning students at a special tea. Students, parents, the full English staff, and many administrators gather for punch and cookies, followed by a presentation of winners in local, state, national contests; by a presentation of special school, college, and university awards; by announcements of new yearbook and newspaper staffs; and, finally, by the announcement of the winner of the Taft award, kept secret until this moment. At our Pen and Press Tea on May 28, 1980, which was our 15th annual tea, awards were given to a total of 325 students: 211 earned recognition for writing and 114 for serving on various staffs.

Much of the success of our students must be attributed to a stimulating and supporting environment. Indeed, Evanston Township High School students are frequently award winners; their teachers, their English Department, and their school administration encourage them to be and reward them when they are.